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THE TWO TRAILS;

OR,

SAM GRINTER'S SEARCH.

BY J. STANLEY HENDERSON,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

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THE TWO TRAILS.

CHAPTER I.

LOS INDIOS!

"MIRE, Don Tomas!—Look! The Indians are yonder!"

"Pshaw, Jose! I am surprised that you, a man of such undoubted courage, should tremble at trees. Those are nothing but bunches of palmas."

Tom Howell was right. The objects which his timorous servant supposed to be fierce Camanches, painted and armed for war, were in reality specimens of a species of palm, which grows on the northern plains of Mexico, to the height of five or six feet, nearly as thick as a man's body, with a bunch of long and narrow leaves issuing from the top of the stem. At a distance it bears a striking resemblance to an Indian with a head-dress of feathers.

"Did you say that I trembled? You must surely be mistaken, for there never was an enemy yet that made me tremble. It is true that I mistook the palmas for savages, but I was not afraid of them—not I, indeed! Let the barbarians come, and I will show you how I will hew them down."

The boastful Mexican drew a rusty sword, galloped furiously up to one of the trees, and dealt it a tremendous blow. The palma did not appear to suffer, but the weapon was broken in two, and Jose Maria returned, with a crestfallen air, to his master, who was laughing heartily at his gasconading exploit and its termination.

"Ah, señor," said the discomfited servant, "I have broken my sword, and there was no better blade in Mexico. The cursed tree was as hard as a stone."

"Let us hope that the head of the next Indian you meet will be softer. Now, Jose, as you have slaughtered all the enemies in sight, suppose we hurry on, that we may reach our destination before nightfall. What is the name of the village that you spoke of?"

"It is called Jarral Grande, your excellency."

Horses and mules were again put in motion, and the little cavalcade continued its way over the dry and musketo-covered plain, toward the little village of Jarral Grande.

Tom Howell was a fine specimen of the young American, who had resided in Mexico during several years, and had gained a good knowledge of the language and customs of the inhabitants. At that period (shortly before the Mexican war) the sparse population of the States of Durango and Chihuahua were supplied with dry goods and other such articles of necessity or luxury by traveling traders (mostly foreigners) who resided in the capitals of those provinces, and journeyed about among the villages and rancherias with small trains of wagons. As the greater part of the country was regularly overrun, at a certain season of the year, by predatory and warlike bands of Indians, this occupation was attended with no small risk to life and property, and the traders had no lack of excitement in the perilous adventures and narrow escapes that were continually occurring.

Tom Howell had invested his means in one of these caravans, in company with a man named David Longman, who had been for some time engaged in the business, but had lately lost all he possessed by the Indians. Not at all daunted by his ill luck, he had procured more wagons, and had easily persuaded the young American to join him in his exciting occupation. Howell had been detained at Durango by business and had set out, much later than he had wished to, to join his partner on the plains.

It was in the month of September, known in the Camanche calendar as the Mexico moon, when those fierce and warlike savages, encouraged by impunity, annually made their expeditions into the northern province of Mexico, in three great divisions, laying waste the country on all sides, depopulating villages, destroying ranchos, slaughtering the cowardly or defenseless men, and carrying off women and children, horses and cattle, in great numbers.

Already they were overrunning the States of Durango and Chihuahua, and nothing was heard but the accounts of their ravages. Howell had good reason to fear that his partner was in trouble, and was hastening to overtake the caravan.

Several times, during his journey, he had met with ruined or deserted ranchos, had crossed the trail of a large party of savages, had passed places where they had but recently been encamped, and had seen various evidences of their atrocity ; but he had not yet encountered any thing that looked like an Indian, until his servant called his attention to the bunches of palmas, which bore such a striking resemblance to the roving Camanches.

It was near sunset when Jose said that they were approaching the village. The road had been winding through a broken and rugged country, and they were about to emerge upon the plain, when Howell looked ahead, and saw a number of Indians on a bluff, at a little distance on the left of the road.

There was no mistake this time. They were veritable Camanches, half naked, and painted and armed for the war-path.

Howell's first anxiety was for the safety of his mules and his Mexican, lest they should see the enemy and stampede, in which event it was very probable that they would be lost.

He instantly dismounted, and covered the eyes of the mules with their tapojos or blinders. Then catching the bridle of his servant's horse, he pointed to the Indians on the hill.

The sight caused Jose at once to forget all his boastings and threats. Like other Mexicans, he had been accustomed to run from the Indians, and his first impulse was to fly.

"This will never do, amigo," said Tom Howell, jerking him from his saddle to the ground. " You were very valiant while there were no enemies in sight, but you seem to lose all your courage as soon as we meet them."

" Ah, señor, they are so many, and we are so few. We are lost men, for the barbaros will assuredly murder us unless we can escape from them."

" You will assuredly be a dead man if you leave me. I don't intend to let you run away in this fashion, Jose. You must stay and fight. If you make a move to get on that horse, I will shoot you down."

More terrified by the threatening voice and gestures of his master, than by the remoter demonstrations of the savages, the affrighted Mexican sunk upon his knees, and hurriedly invoked all the saints he could think of.

Tom Howell, thinking that a bold front would be a better

protection than all the saints in the calendar, and seeing the Indians commence descending the hill, seated himself on the ground, with his rifle at a rest, and his carbine and other fighting material by his side, ready to fire upon them as soon as they should come within range.

They soon stopped, however, and gave him to understand, by shouting and by signs, that he might pass on if he would deliver up his animals.

Being by no means disposed to do this, the young American stubbornly maintained his position, without making any reply to their demands, keeping his rifle pointed threateningly at the foremost of his foes.

Matters remained in this condition for about half an hour, the Indians occasionally making demonstrations as if to descend the hill, but deterred by the hostile attitude of Howell, the mules standing steadily with their eyes blinded, and the Mexican, still on his knees, trembling and calling upon the saints.

Perceiving that the Indians did not intend to attack him, although he wondered why they refrained from doing so, Howell directed Jose to mount his horse and drive the mules before him to the village, while he remained behind to cover the retreat.

The Mexican joyfully obeyed, and was soon in his saddle, galloping like a madman, with the mules flying helter-skelter before him, and did not stop until he was safe in the plaza, or center of the village.

Howell followed more slowly, turning about, every now and then, to confront the Indians, if they should take it into their heads to pursue him. They did not molest him, however, and he soon rode safely into the settlement.

There he found Jose, the most important man on the plaza, relating to the open-mouthed and affrighted inhabitants his miraculous escape from a horde of savages, and boasting of his wonderful exploits.

The people were in a state of the greatest excitement and confusion, eager for "novedades"—news of the Indians, as that was the only news that had any interest to them—and Howell found plenty of employment in telling what he knew, and in listening to the accounts of the villagers.

While he was thus occupied, he was accosted by a singular-looking person, in whom, by his appearance as well as his language, he at once recognized an American.

This individual was long, lank and big-boned, his eyes hollow, his cheeks emaciated, and his frame wasted almost to a skeleton, as if he had been completely worn out by starvation and exposure. His habiliments had originally been those of a hunter, but they now hung in rags about him, and combined with his long and straggling hair to render his appearance grotesque in the extreme.

He easily passed through the crowd, as all made way for this walking skeleton, and he spoke to Howell almost in a whisper, his voice having left him when he lost his flesh.

"My name is Sam Grinter, stranger, and I'm powerful glad to see you."

"And I am glad to meet a countryman," replied Howell. "You look as if you had seen hard times lately."

"I have that, stranger, and no mistake. My name is Sam Grinter, and I hail from Kaintucky, and I want to speak to you about a watch."

"I have nothing here to sell," said Tom, supposing the man wished to purchase a timepiece. "The wagons are not with me, and I do not know where they are."

"It ain't about buyin' a watch that I wanted to speak to you, stranger, fur I reckon I own as good an artickler of that dis-triction as war ever made, though I hain't got it with me now, and feel kinder lost without it. I think I heern you say that you stopped at an arroyo this side of the rancho of Los Alamitos."

"I did not stop there, as the Indian trail crossed the arroyo at that place, and their sign was so plentiful, that I turned aside and went on."

"Did you appear to see some token of a scrimmage thar-about?"

"Yes. The ground looked as if there had been some fighting in the neighborhood, and I saw buzzards hovering about."

"Then that poor feller is done fur, I reckon."

"What poor fellow?"

"Jack Bird; the man I traveled with across the mountings. My name is Sam Grinter, stranger, and I hail fr'm old Kain-

tucky. Me and him had a right smart chance of a scrimmage at that arroyo ; but the red-skins war too much fur us, and we war obliged fur to run, and we got separated, and that's whar I lost that watch. It war the best watch, stranger, that you ever sot eyes onto, I reckon. It was nigh as big as my hand, fur size, and fur heft, stranger, I reckon it war a heftier watch nor you ever hefted, in *this* world, and all solid silver, ginni-wine silver and no mistake. The works, stranger, war the almightyest best works that war ever put into a watch, in *this* world. They would jest beat steamboats fur runnin', and they war never knowed to stop. The sun never dar'd to rise, stranger, 'ceptin' when that watch told him to, and I could allers know whar to find myself when I had it by me."

"How did you get separated from such a valuable companion?"

"P'raps I drapped it in the scrimmage, or lost it while I war runnin' ; fur I ain't ashamed to confess, stranger, that I did some tall runnin' about that time. I lost sight of Jack Bird, and I hid and sneaked and footed it about, ontil I foteched up here, and then I had been a long time, stranger, with nothin' to eat or drink."

"You look as if you had been starved."

"I war jest that, stranger, and I war powerful glad to see you, 'cause I 'lowed to ax you if you mought hev seen that watch anywhar about that arroyo."

"I saw nothing of the kind, my friend."

"My name is Sam Grinter, and I hail from old Kaintucky. P'raps you mought hev heerd it tickin', as it war a partic'lar loud ticker."

"I am sorry to say, Sam, that I neither saw nor heard it."

"That's bad ag'in. I've been tryin' to git the Gov'nor of this yere town to send out a party with me, to look fur that watch and poor Jack Bird ; but he won't do it, and I ain't party enough, by myself."

"I shall be going back in that direction in a few days, if I do not meet my wagons or hear from them at this place, and I would be glad to have your company."

"Thank you, stranger. That watch is worth lookin' arter, fur sure, and p'raps I mought find suthin' of poor Jack Bird.

My name is Sam Grinter, from Kaintucky, stranger, and I'll see you ag'in."

The long and lean hunter walked slowly and solemnly away, and Tom Howell began to look about for quarters for himself, his servant and his animals, as all were tired and hungry.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF GABRIEL.

Tom Howell had plenty of offers of accommodation pressed upon him, as the inhabitants of the village were in hourly dread of an attack by the Indians, and all were anxious to have in their houses a man who possessed good arms and who knew how to use them.

He accepted the proposition of a widow lady, who showed him a neat, whitewashed adobe house, with a corral surrounded by big trees and grape-vines, and an abundance of water and fodder for his animals.

She was a lone widow, she said, whose husband had been killed by the barbaros, with nothing in the world but herself and her daughter, and only a *buellada* of two hundred cattle or so to depend upon, and they were scattered, the good Lord only knew where. She was glad enough to have the company and protection of an American, who was a man indeed, and who could guard herself and her child against the merciless savages.

Howell's first care, after he had attended to the well-being of his animals, was to cause his servant to prepare a large pot of soup, while he went out to look for his new friend Sam Grinter, of Kaintucky.

Having found that individual, he invited him to come and share his soup, a request which the emaciated Kentuckian readily obeyed, eating so enormously that he could hardly stand when he had finished the repast, and he soon fell asleep in a corner of the corral.

The handsome young American was not long in discovering that his hostess had a very pretty daughter. In fact, of all

the wonderful, burning black eyes that he had seen among the Mexican muchachas, none had so surprised, dazzled and bewildered him, as those of Marita Ortiz, and her features seemed formed to accompany them, which is as much as could be said for any face. Those brilliant orbs attracted the attention of Tom Howell when he first entered her mother's dark room, shining so brightly that he thought any other light would be superfluous, until a candle was brought in, and he saw the full beauty of her face.

The señorita might have been seventeen or eighteen years old, and she was as gay and coquettish as she was pretty, and she well knew how to use those speaking black eyes which had been given her to illuminate and set off her beauty. There was, indeed, but little need that she should talk, while she could express so much with her eyes. Howell was entranced, and thought that he would be "in clover," as long as he could enjoy the hospitality of the widow Ortiz.

It was while he was seated in the widow's room, by a pleasant fire, answering the flashes of Marita's black eyes, and listening to the chatter of the good lady, that the latter told him the story of Gabriel.

"Yes, Marita is very pretty," she said, noticing the young American's evident admiration of her daughter. "She was born in Durango, and, as you must know, las Durangueñas son muy halagueñas—the ladies of Durango are very bewitching. There must be something in the air, señor, that makes them so beautiful."

"She has doubtless had many suitors," suggested Howell, "and the young men of the neighborhood are crazy about her, I suppose."

"You speak truly, señor. She has had many suitors, but she cares little for any of them. The young men of the village are cowards, and Marita knows it. They make a great show, and they look brave enough, when they are mounted on their fine horses, prancing forth to their bull-fights and their games, but they are worth nothing when real danger is at hand. Put arms in their hands, and they do not know how to use them, and will run away rather than fight. Tell them that the Indians are coming, and that they must defend the women and children, and where are they when the barbaros are upon us?"

Escondidos como los ratones—hid like rats in their holes! No, señor, our young men are not brave, and my child will have little to do with them, for it was owing to their cowardice that her father, my poor Bernardo, lost his life at the hands of the savages."

"Are you not afraid, mother," asked Marita, "that Gabriel may be among the savages who are near the village?"

"May all the saints preserve us! You were asking, señor, if the young men of the neighborhood had been crazy about my Marita. There was one who was indeed crazy about her, but he was not as cowardly as the rest. He stood by my poor Bernardo when he was killed, and I loved him for that; but he was a devil. Yes, señor; Gabriel Yanes was a true son of the enemy of the world."

"If he was an admirer of Marita, he at least showed his good taste."

"An admirer! Ah, señor, his love amounted to frenzy. I thought he would go mad when she refused him; for the child could not bear the sight of him, and she was afraid of him. She told him so, and I never saw a man in such a fury. He looked and acted like a perfect madman. He came to me with his complaints, but I told him that I could do nothing for him, and Marita would not see him or speak to him!"

"Poor fellow!"

"I pitied him, señor, for he moped about as if his heart was broken. He would eat nothing, and he dwindled away until he became like a shadow. But I would not have pitied him, if I had known how black and bad his heart was."

"What did he do?"

"This went on for several weeks, señor, until we had a grand game of coléa de toros outside of the village, to which came the rancheros and muchachas from the country far and near. We had upward of a hundred bulls in the corral, and more than two hundred horsemen to chase them, and it was grand sport. I have never in my life seen a better or more exciting game."

"It must have been worth seeing."

"It was a splendid sight, señor, and among all the horsemen there was none like Gabriel. He easily eclipsed all the fine young rancheros, outriding and outmaneuvering the best of

them. There was none who threw so many bulls as Gabriel, none who did his work so bravely and skillfully, none who won such shouts and waving of rebosos from the men and the muchachas. I would not have wondered at it as I did, señor, if I had then known, as I afterward knew, that he had sold himself to the enemy of mankind."

Marita shuddered, and her good mother crossed herself devoutly.

"When the game was closed, señor, Gabriel came up and demanded that Marita should ride with him around the plain. She was afraid to do so, but she could not refuse, for he was the victor, and she mounted her alazan and set out. They were soon lost to view, for their horses were very swift, and nothing was seen of them but a little cloud of dust in the distance. Then we could not even see the dust, and I became frightened, as well I might be, for it turned out that Gabriel had seized the bridle of my child's horse, and had forced her to ride away with him, far from the village and far from the crowd. My fears were soon communicated to the rest, and a number of the bull-fighters set out in pursuit; but their horses were tired, and there was no chance for them to overtake the horses of Gabriel and Marita. They returned without having come in sight of the fugitives, and I was carried home weeping and fainting, for I was sure that I should not see my child again."

"How did she ever return?"

"They traveled many, many miles, I suppose, and it was night when her bridle broke in his hand, and her horse became frightened and ran away with her. Gabriel attempted to overtake her, but her alazan was much fleeter than his horse, and was frightened besides. It is a wonder that she was not thrown, but she was more afraid of Gabriel than of the horse, and she managed to keep her seat. He lost her after a while, and the horse carried her off, she did not know where; but she wandered about until she reached the village, half dead with fright and exhaustion. You will easily believe, señor, that she was ill for many days after that."

"What became of Gabriel?"

"He came into the village the next day, looking very sour and gloomy. I could do nothing to punish him, and there

was no one to take my part, for all were afraid of Gabriel. He remained here a short time, and then he suddenly went away, vowing that he would yet have Marita, alive or dead, and that neither saints nor fiends could keep her from him. When we next heard of him he had joined the savages, and was making war upon his own countrymen, like an accursed renegade as he is, and I verily believe that it was only for the purpose of watching a chance to carry off my child ; but I pray nightly to San Ysidro that his evil designs may be foiled."

Again Marita shuddered, and again her mother crossed herself devoutly.

"Last year our village was harried by the Indians," continued the good lady ; "but Marita and I were luckily in Durango. Many were killed, and others were carried away, and I heard from some who escaped by hiding among the houses, that Gabriel was among the barbaros, riding about and cursing frightfully, swearing that he would find my child if he had to ransack every village and rancho in the country."

"Why do you remain here?" asked Howell. "Why do you not go to some safer place to reside?"

"We were promised that the soldiers should protect us this year, but they are cowards like the rest. If the Indians are coming in from the north, the soldiers are sure to march toward the south. I had intended to go to Durango, but the barbaros came in earlier than usual this year, and now I am not able to go."

Howell promised the good señora that he would protect her daughter with his life, and his looks told Marita a great deal more when she thanked him with her speaking black eyes. Then, as it was getting late, and he had no reasonable excuse for prolonging his stay with his hostess, he went across the corral to his own room and went to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

SEPARATED AND SCATTERED.

THE more Tom Howell saw of Marita Ortiz, the more he fell in love with her—there is no other word for it. He could not wonder at Gabriel Yanes for having acted like a madman when she rejected his suit, or for having attempted to carry her off at the *coleá de toros*. He might have done the same thing, he thought, under similar circumstances, though he was sure that he would not have joined the Indians.

L The beauty of the Mexican girl so fascinated him, that he remained at Jarral Grande somewhat longer than he had intended to, excusing himself by alleging that his animals needed to be recruited.

His stay did not displease Marita, and it pleased her mother greatly, as the widow Ortiz, strange as it may seem, felt that there was more protection in the presence of one American than in that of twenty Mexicans. The Indians did not show themselves in the neighborhood after his arrival at the village, and Howell twice rode out into the country to reconnoiter, accompanied by Sam Grinter, whose strength and spirits improved rapidly. They saw no Indians, nor did they find any sign of them, and they concluded that the savages had either recrossed the Rio Grande, or were continuing their depredations more to the westward and southward.

These tidings were very acceptable to the villagers, who then considered themselves at liberty to gather the maize in their milpas, and to drive forth their cattle to feed upon the plains. Feasts and sandangoes were the order of the day and night. The young American was made much of, and he enjoyed himself highly in the society of the beautiful Marita.

But his pleasure was not to last. At the end of four days he received information from a ranchero, to the effect that David Longman and his wagons had been heard of, many miles to the north-west, with a strong band of Indians hanging on their trail.

Mr. Howell could delay no longer. With many protestations of love for Marita, and of kind regard for her mother, he bade both farewell, assuring them that he believed them to be out of danger for that season, and promising to return and visit them as soon as possible.

He took with him Sam Grinter, who had proved himself to be a very valuable man in the reconnoitering expeditions that they had undertaken together, and his Mexican servant, Jose Maria, who was very reluctant to risk his scalp again, though he went forth full of bravado, assuring the villagers that none of the barbaros would dare to come within reach of him.

The tall Kentuckian, whose appearance had been improved by the good fare at the village, although his limbs were nearly as lank as ever, was in good spirits during the journey, for he hoped to gain some intelligence concerning his friend, Jack Bird, and to find "that watch," the loss of which he never ceased to lament, with many encomiums on its value.

It was but fitting that such fidelity to a beloved object should be finally rewarded. When they were approaching the arroyo near which he and Jack Bird had had their "scrimmage" with the Indians, Sam Grinter kept his eyes fastened on the ground, and rode about in all directions, begging Howell and the Mexican to look out carefully for his precious timepiece. At last he stopped suddenly, and pointed toward a bunch of mezquite near the side of the road.

"Thar she is!" he exclaimed, eagerly and joyfully. "Thar she is, lookin' up at me and shinin', like the ginniwine chunk of solid silver that she is!"

Instantly dismounting, he ran to pick it up.

"I'm keen to sw'ar that she is runnin' yit!" he exclaimed, as he stopped and half turned around. "Jest listen, Mr. Howell! Don't you hear her tickin'?"

"Are you crazy, man?" replied Howell. "That is a rattle-snake that you hear. Look out for yourself!"

The Kentuckian jumped aside, just in time to escape the blow of a large and vicious serpent, that sprung out from the bunch of mezquite. He hastily drew the cleaning-rod from his rifle, and killed the reptile before it could get away. He then stepped forward and picked up his watch.

"To think that I should hev mistook the rattle of a durned snake fur the tickin' of that thar timepiece!" he muttered, as he examined his recovered treasure. "Jest look a-here, Cap! She's runnin' yit, jest as I told you! She hain't stopped arry time, sence I lost her."

The delighted Kentuckian ran and showed the watch to Tom Howell. It was a very large, stout, and heavy piece of mechanism, old-fashioned enough to have been one of the first specimens of watch manufacture. It was running, without doubt, for the second-hand was slowly going its rounds, and its ticking was loud enough to wake a sleeping man.

"It's goin' on two weeks sence I lost her, and she's runnin' yit!" triumphantly exclaimed Grinter. "I told you that she war never knowed to stop."

"It does seem strange," replied Howell, "but it can be accounted for. I suppose the watch stopped when you dropped it, and commenced to run again when you picked it up."

"That sort of talk mought do, Cap., ef you war speakin' of a common watch; but you don't know this creetur' as I do. She's jest the outrunnin'est thing that was ever put together, in *this* world. Thar's another powerful good p'int about her, Cap. Whenever I feel kinder squamperized, or in doubt about what I ort to do, I allers look at her, and she tells me, p'intedly, the very thing, whether to go ahead or hold on, whether to kerry a high head or lie low."

"What does she say now, Sam? I would like to hear from her, for this is a dangerous place."

"She says—Look out, look out, look out! Don't you hear her, Cap.? It's jest as plain as speakin'."

"She gives very good advice, and it comes just in time, for there are Indians on the hill yonder, and we will have to fight them."

There was no chance to escape, for the Indians were mounted, and were already preparing to swoop down upon the little party. They were some twenty or thirty in number, and they doubtless supposed that they would find the three white men an easy prey.

Tom Howell dismounted, and threw the blinders over the eyes of the mules; while Grinter took off the packs, and arranged them so as to form a little fortification for each of them.

While they were thus engaged, they had neglected to notice the Mexican, who, seized with a sudden panic, jumped on his horse, and galloped off toward the distant rancho, screaming like a madman, and shrieking to the saints for assistance. The Indians, seeing this solitary horseman careering over the plain, at once set out in pursuit of him, and he was soon surrounded by them, as a wounded deer by a flock of vultures. In a few moments he was flung from his saddle, speared through the body, and the next instant his gory scalp was hanging at the waist of a half-naked Camanche.

"Thar's an end of that durned fool, and it's our turn next," said Grinter.

"They will not find as easy a job here, I think. For my part, I am determined to sell my life for all it will bring."

"I'm thar, too, Cap., and here's a bead for the fust red-skin that comes within reach."

The Indians were not as ready to attack the two resolute Americans, as they had been to follow the flying Mexican. They rode in circles around the little fortification, as if searching for a weak spot, or waiting for an unguarded moment, but all the while decreasing their distance, and gradually approaching their adversaries. The white men turned as they turned, keeping behind their packs, with their weapons ready for instant use, and their watchful eyes noticing every movement of their enemies.

"This sort of thing can't last much longer," said Sam Grinter. "Here goes to let 'em know who we are."

His rifle cracked, and one of the foremost Indians fell from his horse. This caused a little excitement and a temporary cessation of hostilities among them, and then, with wild whoops and yells, brandishing their spears and shields, they rushed down upon the two Americans, firing their guns and arrows as they came.

Tom Howell emptied the two barrels of his rifle among them, reserving his carbine for closer quarters, and Grinter followed with a shot from his long piece. The Camanches, not relishing this reception—for every shot had told—turned and galloped off, and resumed their watchful circling about the plain.

Although the attack had been repulsed, its consequences

had been serious. One of the mules had been struck, and the others stampeded; Howell's horse had been killed; and he himself had been wounded in the leg, completely disabling that limb.

"This yere is what mought be called a bad fix," said the Kentuckian, as he tied a handkerchief tight around his companion's leg. "If the red-skins knowed how bad off we are, they would soon make meat of us."

"They will easily find it out, I am afraid. What does your watch say, Sam?"

"I'd forgot to ax her. She says—Help nigh, help nigh, help nigh! That's what she says, Cap., and you ken hear her talkin'."

"She is right, as usual. Look yonder, Sam! That must be Dave Longman's train of wagons, for there is no other that would be likely to be in these parts at this time."

At a considerable distance to the westward could be seen a cloud of dust, and the practiced eyes of the two Americans easily determined that it arose from a train of three or four wagons, that was slowly moving across the plain. On they came, until they could be quite plainly distinguished, and then, as if wishing to avoid the Indians, turned off in another direction.

A shipwrecked sailor, floating on the wide ocean, could not be more disappointed at the approach and departure of a sail, than were our two friends at this downfall of their hopes. Still their savage foes wheeled in circles around them, gradually drawing nearer, and preparing for a final and fatal swoop.

"There is only one thing to be done," said Tom Howell, speaking sadly and wearily enough. "You must mount your horse, Sam, and ride out to catch that caravan. You can ride clear of the Indians, and perhaps you can bring some men from the wagons to help me."

"And leave you here! I can't do that, Cap."

"You must. It is my only chance. We will both be scalped if you stay here. I would try it with you, but I can not mount a horse, or stay on him if I could get in the saddle, and I have no horse now. My only hope is, to keep the red-skins off until help can reach me. If it should come to the worst, I have my pistols, and can make them count. Be

quick, Sam ! for there is a good chance to cross the arroyo now."

"This yere watch tells me that I ort not to go."

"But I say you must. Be off, if you wish me to have a chance for life!"

Reluctantly the Kentuckian mounted his horse, drove his spurs into the animal's sides, and dashed off toward the distant wagons. Having taken his opportunity while the savages were riding in another direction, he succeeded in eluding them, and crossed the arroyo amid their shouts of anger and disappointment.

When he reached the other side of the watercourse, he heard two shots from his friend's rifle, and knew that there was hot work behind him. Looking around, he saw the Indians closing in upon their victim, who brought down two more of them with his pistols. In another moment there was nothing to be seen, where Howell had been, but a cloud of dust, and a mass of frantic, half-naked savages.

Grinter put spurs to his horse, and hastened to overtake the caravan, which proved to be that of David Longman, to whom the Kentuckian briefly related his adventure and the probable fate of Tom Howell.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Longman, who was a man of few words, but strong feelings.

As the Indians soon disappeared, the train was turned back, and passed over the scene of the conflict; but not even the remains of Howell could be found, and the Indians who had fallen had all been buried or carried off.

The wagons then went on to Jarral Grande, Grinter accompanying them. On their arrival at that village they discovered that it was deserted and almost in ruins, with smoke still rising from the burned buildings. From some straggling inhabitants who had ventured to return, they learned that the village had been harried by the Camanches, who had slaughtered many of the people, and carried off a number of the women and children. Among those who had been taken away was the pride of the village, the beautiful Marita Ortiz.

CHAPTER IV

OLD FRIENDS.

SPRING was breaking among the valleys of the Little Colorado, or Red River Creek, a stream which takes its rise among the mountains of New Mexico, flows toward the north-west, and empties into the Colorado of the west.

Spring was breaking, too, among the mountains that lifted their rugged and snow-covered crests to the clouds, and along the many streams and brooks in the hills, by which the Little Colorado is fed. The snow and ice were melting, and these tributaries were running full of water, which was to find its way, after traveling many miles, to the distant shore of the Pacific.

The sun had passed the meridian, and was descending toward the western horizon, when a man was slowly forcing his way up a mountainous ridge, along one of those little streams, which he had ascended from its junction with the main river in the valley below.

The traveler was our friend Sam Grinter, who sailed from "old Kaintucky," and he again looked wasted and worn, as if he had seen hard usage during the winter that had just ended. His clothes were in tatters, his long limbs were scantily covered with flesh, and his gaunt steed looked as if famine and hard work had nearly made an end of him. As this architectural animal toiled up the rough and slippery way, his rider mentally soliloquized :

"This yere sort of travelin' is jest about a sprinkle over my rain-storm, and I'm tired of it. Thar must be some way to git through or over this mounting somewhar, and this bit of a watercourse ort to fetch me out safe; but it's powerful rough goin', and it seems to grow wuss the further I git. Durned if I don't feel kinder streaked, fur I ain't a bit fond of the idee of bein' cotched out at night up here. If I kain't git over the mounting afore night, I ort to turn back; but, if I ken git over the mounting afore night, I wouldn't go back fur consid'ble. I wish I knowed whether I could make the riffle or not.

I wish I could git along as fast and as easy as that thar water does. I wish old Jack Bird hadn't been rubbed out by the cussed Camanches, and that he was with me now.

"Thar, by thunder!" he exclaimed, as his further progress was barred by a precipitous bluff, that rose up like a wall before him, to the hight of eighty or a hundred feet, from the top of which the stream that he had been following fell in a shower of spray.

"Durn my skin if thar is any use in tryin' to go further this way," he continued. "Even if I could foller the stream and climb that rock, it's sartin that this hoss couldn't do it. This yere is what I call a fix, and no mistake. Thar's nothin' fur it, I reckon, but to turn around and climb down the mounting, and that will be a powerful sight wuss than climbin' up. I wonder what old tickler says about it. She ought to be able to tell me suthin' by this time."

He took out his large watch, looked attentively at its face, and listened to its ticking.

"She says—Go on, go on, go on! That beats the nation. She never told me wrong in her life, and now she wants me to do what is up-and-downright onpossible. However, I've got it to do, and I feel about it kinder like the nigger felt who said he would jump through a stun fence if the Lord told him to. He 'lowed that the Lord would look arter his gittin' through, and he only had to 'tend to the jumpin'. I'll foller your advice, old tickler, if it takes me to the moon."

Pushing his horse close up to the edge of the precipice, the Kentuckian discovered an opening a little way to the left, which he thought might lead him to the top, and he turned to enter it.

"By the horn spoons!"

This exclamation, and the voice that uttered it, sounded familiar to Sam Grinter. He looked up in astonishment, and saw that it proceeded from a man who was seated on a ledge of the rock, about thirty feet above his head.

This individual was short and stout, with a figure that spoke good living, and a broad face that was shining with good-humor. In spite of his grizzled hair and beard, he was jolly and rubicund, looking as if he had long ago driven dull care out of doors and turned the key upon him. He was

dressed in rough hunter's attire, and a couple of traps were slung over his back, and his rifle lay upon his knees before him

"By the horn spoons! I say, is that you Sam Grinter?"

"It's what's left of me. And who are you, if you are a human?"

"Rub up the hind-sights of your memory, and see if you can't draw a bead on Jack Bird."

"The thun-der-ation! Do you mean to say that you are Jack Bird, shore enough?"

"I reckon I am, if I wasn't swapped off when I was a baby I've gone by that name these forty year and more."

"I 'lowed you war rubbed out by the Camanches, when we had that scrimmage with 'em down in Mexico."

"I thought you were in the same fix, old hoss. What are you doin' up here?"

"Tryin' to git over the mounting. How did you happen to save your scalp out of that scrimmage?"

"It's too long a story to tell now. You won't make much headway in crossin' the mountain by this route."

"What shall I do then? I axed old tickler, and she told me to go ahead. How ken I git up thar, Jack?"

"Reckon I'll have to go down and show you. There's no use in comin' up here, though. You mought as well go with me to my hole, and we will have a big talk to-night."

The fat man disappeared from the ledge, and soon reached his friend, who seized him in his long arms, and gave him a regular bear's hug.

"By the horn spoons!" exclaimed Bird. "You are as lovin' as a she grizzly. You don't mean to say, Sam, that that skellinton of a crittur has carried you all the way up from that valley? Fur marcy's sake, let him lean ag'inst a rock and rest himself. That bundle of bones would make the buzzards as mad as a pack of hornets."

"He's a tol'able good hoss, though. Jest you put him on a patch of fresh buffler grass, and he'll hide his ribs in a day and a night."

"Come with me, then, and I will show you where he can pick plenty of young spring sprouts."

Jack Bird led the way, and Grinter followed, leading his

horse. They went into the opening in the rock which the Kentuckian had noticed, and which proved to be a pass, leading upward, by a gradual and easy ascent, until they reached a pleasant valley in the side of the mountain, where there was a little lake, the source of the stream which Grinter had been following. In this valley the spring grass was shooting up abundantly, and Jack Bird's horse was grazing there, looking fat and healthy. Sam Grinter's bony steed was instantly loosed to join him, expressing his gratification by neighing vociferously.

"What are you doin', up here in the mountings, Jack?" asked Grinter.

"Can't you see, boy? I have been trappin' it here through the winter, and have found the beaver tol'able plenty. I think I shall get a good pile of skins this spring. I have been lookin' out for beaver-sign and for more streams to set my traps on, and was on my way home when I met you. Come along, Sam, and I will show you where I live."

"Any Injuns about?" asked Grinter, as he followed the lead of his companion.

"Precious few. Sca'cely any, except the Moquis, and they are the best red-skins in world. Ever have any thing to do with any of those critturs, Sam?"

"No. I reckon red-skins are purty much the same everywhar."

"These come as near to bein' white men as red-skins can come. They are what we call the Welsh Indians, Sam."

"What in thunder are Welsh Injuns?"

"Thar's a story, Sam, that some Welshmen came over here, ever so long ago—some time arter the deluge, I reckon, but afore Christopher Columbus was heerd of. They settled down here among the red-skins, and the Moquis are what came of mixin' the breeds."

"Jest tell me what Welshmen are, Jack."

"They are a sort of Englishmen. The Moquis are not near as dark as the other red-skins, and some of 'em are right white, whiter than you or I."

"I reckon you may stop thar, Jack Bird. That beats the stories of the flyin' beaver and the carcajou. You've got a powerful sight of larnin', but you cain't stuff any sech stretchers

into this child. White Injuns! You mought as well talk of white crows."

"What I tell you is true, Sam, and you may see the men yourself, if you ever go among the Moquis. An' that ain't all. They have white hair, as well as white skins, and white eyes."

"I reckon you've said enough on that subjec', old hoss. I wouldn't like to tell sech a story to anybody but a friend, 'cause thar'd hev to be a fight when he called me a liar. How mu. is further are you goin', Jack?"

"Not a great way."

"You don't mean to say that you hang out on that rock, way up yonder?"

The Kentuckian pointed at a lofty and rocky bluff, that rose up before them to a great hight, stretching toward the north. About half-way up this rugged cliff could be seen a small hole in the rock, like the entrance to a cave. Shining from this point, Sam Grinter indistinctly perceived the white light of a fire.

"No, Sam, I don't live there, and I wouldn't, for all the beaver-skins in the country. The red-skins have got some kind of a big medicine up there, and it ain't healthy for a white man to go nigh it. I tried it once, when I first came to these parts, and I was mighty glad to get down alive."

"What is up thar, Jack? The Mexicans think that the Injuns know all about the old mines, whar heaps of gold and silver are hid away, and that they keep the secret, so that the white men shan't find 'em out. Don't you reckon that one of thar mines mought be up in that bluff?"

"Not a bit of it. They've got some cussed idol, or saint, or some other kind of witchcraft, hid away there, and they want to keep it to themselves. I know this, Sam—they have got gold and silver tricks hangin' up in that cave, enough to load a mule. They keep a fire burnin' there all the time, day and night, never lettin' it go out, and a white man to tend it. The white man is half naked and chained."

"P'raps it is one of those white Injuns you war talkin' about."

"No. He is a white man, with black hair and eyes, young and good-lookin'."

"You are a powerful hand at big stories, Jack Bird. I don't

believe a durned word you say—meanin' no offense—but I mean to take a peep at that hole in the rock, afore I am many days older."

" You had better not try it, if you want to save your scalp."

" Let me alone fur takin' keer of my scalp. Hurry up, Jack, fur I am mortal tired and hungry."

CHAPTER V.

AN ASTONISHED TRADER.

CINCO pesos, señor—five dollars, and worth six."

It was David Longman who spoke, who was exposing his wares for sale in a street of one of the pueblos of the Moquis, north of the Little Colorado. A large portion of the population—men, women and children—had crowded about him, to stare and wonder at him, and he was no less surprised than they were, at the sight of this strange town and its strange inhabitants, there in the heart of the wilderness.

Around him was a town, or small city, the houses of which were all built of stone, some of them being quite large and lofty, and the streets neat and well-kept. Here were Indians, exhibiting a great degree of intelligence and civilization, well dressed, though not in the fashions of white men, with a good and stable government of their own, with all necessary appliances for comfortable living, with sheep-folds and cotton-fields, looms and potteries. All this, hundreds of miles from any country that called itself civilized, and in an almost inaccessible locality.

To reach this town, which was situated on a high and narrow bluff, the worthy trader had been obliged to travel up a narrow pathway, which was difficult of ascent, even for his sure-footed mules. But he had been kindly welcomed and well received by the inhabitants, to whom the sight of a white man was a great variety.

What had brought him such a distance into the wilderness, so far from civilization and from his accustomed lines of trade?

He hardly knew. After the loss of his friend and partner, Tom Howell, he had become disgusted with Mexico, and had determined to seek a change of scene. He had heard, from wandering trappers, almost fabulous accounts of the cities of the semi-civilized Moquis, in the wilderness far to the north, and he hoped that a profitable trade might be opened with them. At all events, he thought that he would be able to work his way through to the Great Salt Lake, trafficking with trappers and Indians on the way.

He had packed his wares upon mules, and had boldly set off toward the north, attended only by a little black boy, whom he named Skip, and whom he had picked up, as an estray, in the course of his wanderings. But the bluff and honest trader was as fearless and confident as if he had a regiment of soldiers to back him.

He found a very poor market for his wares among the Moquis, as they produced all the articles that they needed, and as very few of them spoke Spanish, and he was entirely unacquainted with their language.

After an ineffectual attempt to sell a crimson sash, at the price of "five dollars, and worth six," he obeyed the summons of the cacique, or governor of the town, who directed him to pack up his merchandise and accompany him.

Following the lead of the dignified old Indian, with the black boy tagging at his heels, Longman soon reached a large stone house, which he entered by ascending a ladder to the roof, and descending another to the principal room.

Meat and bread were set before the stranger, and nothing more could be done until he had eaten, when the cacique informed him that that was a sacred or feast day, during which no business could be transacted, and it was doubtful, indeed, whether the white man would be permitted to trade within the town. He might leave his property in the house of the cacique, however, and might amuse himself by watching the ceremonies from the roof of the building.

Longman expressed himself satisfied, and soon ascended the roof, from which he could plainly see all that was going on in the street. The people were all out—men, women and children—arrayed in their gayest attire, some of them being masked and fantastically clad. Music and dancing were the order of

the day, together with other ceremonies and performances which the trader could not understand.

After a while a procession was formed out of the crowd, or passed through it, at the head of which were a few old men, accompanied by tombes, or Indian drums. After the old men came a number of young women—as Longman supposed them to be, though their faces were so covered by masks, or visors, of willow rods, that their features could not be distinguished. They were all neatly dressed, covered with fine mantles of the purest white, and walked two by two, keeping time with the beating of the drums and the rattling of gourds.

When the procession stopped near the cacique's house, Longman's attention was attracted to a very graceful damsel who stood nearly opposite to him. She was dressed like the other girls in the procession; but her complexion, as well as it could be seen through the bars of her visor, was much whiter and clearer than theirs. Her dark eyes flashed fire between the slender willow rods, and her gaze was directed toward the white man on the roof, as if she would like to speak to him. If such was her wish, she would have been unable to accomplish it, for the beating of the drums made such a deafening noise, that nothing else could be heard.

In a few moments, either by accident or design, her mask fell from her face to the ground, revealing to the eager and astonished gaze of Longman beautiful features of the Mexican type, and a pair of large, dark and brilliant eyes, by which he was fairly fascinated.

He started, as if he meant to descend to the street and go to her; but the hand of the cacique was laid on his shoulder, and the girl's visor was instantly replaced by one of the women. The next moment the procession moved on, and went out of the city, down the steep and narrow path that led to the plain.

"Where are they going? What do they mean to do?" asked the trader, whose curiosity, to say the least, was strongly excited by what he had seen.

"They are going to the mountains," replied the cacique. "They will visit the sacred fire that is kept burning in a cave, and will carry offerings to please our Great Mother, who lives where the sun sets, that she may give us a favorable season for planting our crops."

"What was that white girl doing with them? Where did she come from?"

"There was no white girl among them."

"I saw her."

"Our Great Father, who lives where the sun rises, has been angry with you, and has touched your eyes, so that you can not see straight. You saw no white girl, and you ask too many questions."

Longman was silenced, but not satisfied. He called Skip to his side, and whispered in his ear. After a while, when the old Indian's back was turned, the black boy slipped down the ladder into the street, and ran off in the direction that had been taken by the procession.

The procession returned at about sunset; but Skip did not make his appearance until the next morning, when Longman, descending the ladder to the street, found him coiled up at the foot of the wall.

Skip was a dwarfed and stunted specimen of negro humanity, and was still a child in size, although he must have been fifteen or sixteen years old. He had been for some time a prisoner among the Indians, from whom some compassionate trader had purchased him, and he had "knocked about" until he fell into the hands of Longman, to whom he had become greatly attached. He was strong, active and intelligent, and had many of the ways of the red-men among whom his earlier years had been spent.

His master had taught him to be, like himself, economical in the use of words, and the boy was accustomed, when he did speak, to express his ideas mainly by monosyllables. Longman found this a rather inconvenient habit when he wished Skip to give him an account of what he had seen and heard. By dint of questioning, however, he succeeded in extracting from the boy all the information that he had to give, and Skip's story amounted to this:

He had followed the procession, at such a distance as to be secure from observation, as it crossed the plain and wound up into the mountains, until it reached a lofty and rugged precipice, far in the hills.

Then the old men, followed by the young women, had ascended the cliff by a narrow and difficult path, to a cave that

was situated about half-way between the base and the summit. Skip had followed them unperceived, and took his station behind a rock near the mouth of the cave.

Within the cave a fire was burning brightly, tended by some old men, and near it Skip was surprised to see a white man, seated on a rock, to which his feet were bound by a chain. This white man looked very pale and wretched, and was nearly naked until a white robe was thrown over his shoulders by one of the old men as the procession entered the cave.

As the maidens went in, they carried little images of sheep and other animals, made of clay or dough, and some carried ornaments of gold and silver, which they laid near the fire, before which they prostrated themselves, and then arose and passed out. The girl whom Skip had been directed to watch, as she went in with the rest, dropped her visor as she had done in the town. At this the white man uttered an exclamation and fell on the ground. The mask was immediately replaced, and the fallen man was covered with another mantle.

When the procession left the cave, Skip lingered behind, for he wanted to see more of the white prisoner, who rose to his feet while the old men were engaged in picking up the images, and looked earnestly and sadly out at the opening, passing his hands several times over his forehead, as if in pain.

Skip showed his face, and beckoned to him, making signs of friendship in the Indian fashion. The white man stepped toward him, with a glad smile on his face, as far as his chain would allow, and then made signs to show that he could go no further. Skip did not dare to enter, for he was afraid of the old Indians, who were armed with spears and large knives.

The prisoner then noticed a knife that was in Skip's belt, and he said, by signs, that he wished to possess it, at the same time showing a ring that he was willing to give in exchange.

Skip tossed him the knife, which the white man caught, and threw back the ring to the negro-boy.

Skip did not remain any longer, as he was afraid of being seen by the Indians. After making signs to show that he

would return, he descended the cliff, and followed the procession back to the town.

He watched the maiden whom he had been told to keep in sight, until she was taken within a stone house, and the ladder was drawn up. As he could not enter, he returned to the house of the cacique, and laid down by the wall, waiting to see his master.

Longman asked for the ring that he received from the white man, and Skip gave it to him.

"By thunder!" exclaimed the trader, as he looked at it.

It was a plain gold ring, set with a large ruby, on which was engraved, in German text, the letter H.

"It is Tom Howell's ring, or one exactly like it, by thunder!" said Longman, whose excitement made him unusually verbose. "Is it possible that he is alive, and in these parts? Whoever it is, I mean to find out something about him."

"Goin' to git him out ob dar?" asked Skip.

"I mean to try, by thunder! Skip, I will give you a new knife, and a pistol, and a rifle, by thunder!"

CHAPTER VI.

SAM GRINTER LEARNS SOMETHING.

THE curiosity of Sam Grinter was so excited by what Jack Bird had told him concerning the white man in the cave, that he determined to do as he had said he would do, "to take a peep at that hole in the rock."

Bird had also told him wonderful stories of cities in the wilderness, inhabited by the Indians of whom he had spoken, and the Kentuckian was inclined to discredit these accounts, until one day when they were returning from a hunt. Then Bird pointed out to him, from the summit of a mountain, the walls and high houses of what seemed to be a large town, gleaming from the top of a lofty bluff in the distance.

Even then Grinter was incredulous, and stoutly maintained that the city in the distance was nothing but a mirage, such

as he had often seen when crossing the great desert north-west of the Colorado.

When he became convinced, by closer observation, that the town was no illusion, he wished to go to it; but was dissuaded from so doing by his friend, who said that the Moquis, if they discovered that the white men were trapping beaver in their country, would set upon them and "use them up." They were very good and harmless Indians in his opinion, if let alone, and it was advisable not to give them any cause for ill-will.

After this development, Grinter was more ready to believe what Jack Bird had said about the white prisoner, and he resolved to carry out his purpose of visiting the cave in the cliff, keeping his intention a secret from his friend.

He chose night for the time of his visit, as he would then be more likely to escape observation. The supposed guardians of the cave, he thought, might then be asleep, and he would be able, under cover of the night, to make such an examination as would not be possible in the daytime.

Late in the afternoon he set out, telling Bird that he was going to try to kill a mountain sheep, and dusk found him in a valley, not far from the bluff in which the cave was situated.

As he was about to leave the valley, he caught sight of a trail, which he at once proceeded to examine closely. It had been made by moccasined feet, and was that of a small party of Indians, evidently on the war-path. As it was quite a fresh trail, he followed it cautiously, until he heard the neighing and stamping of a horse. He went on a little further, until he saw the light of a fire, toward which he crept very carefully.

Sitting and lying about the fire, he perceived six red-men, whom, from their dress and their paint, he at once recognized as Camauches. Seven horses were tethered near them, and they had evidently made their camp there for the night.

A closer survey caused Grinter to suspect that one of the party was a white man. In fact, he was quite sure he was not an Indian, although he was dressed and painted like the rest.

The Kentuckian was surprised. What, he thought, were

these Camanches doing here, so far from their own country and their usual range? What business had that white man among them? Where had they been, away from their camp and on foot? The white man might be one of the few renegades who had joined the savages and adopted their life and habits, and his companions had probably been reconnoitering in the neighborhood; but the object of the party, in visiting that locality, was a mystery to Grinter, and he could only suppose that they had come to look for Jack Bird, or to take some scalps among the peaceable Moquis.

Not desiring a nearer acquaintance with such dangerous wanderers, he went back as carefully as he had come, and proceeded up the valley, until his attention was arrested by another fire.

"Durn my buttons!" he muttered, as he stopped and gazed at this new object of wonderment. "It does look as if all creation at once had come into this kentry. Fust came Jack Bird, and then I came, and thar is the white man up in the cave, and behind me are those blamed Camanches, and afore me are some other confounded furreners, the nation knows who. Wonder if I had better go on and take a look at 'em. They cain't be some more Camanches, 'cause they would be with t'other lot if they were, and that don't seem like a red-skin's fire, nohow. 'Spect I ort to ax old tickler."

Slowly and reverently he took out his big watch, and listened to its tickings, as it was too dark to consult its face.

"It says—Go on, go on, go on—and I'd hev to do it, if a she grizzly war right afore me. I will obey your orders, old tickler, but will suit myself in the style of goin'."

He walked carefully toward the light, and then got upon his hands and knees for the purpose of approaching it more closely without being seen.

As he was in this position, peering ahead through the growing darkness, he was surprised by the sight of a small, black face, that was suddenly raised up from behind a log in front of him. Its eyes shone in the darkness, its teeth glistened like ivory, and it made a strange, chattering noise.

While Grinter was staring in astonishment at this black apparition, it uttered a screech, bounded up into the air, and pounced upon him like some wild creature of the woods.

The Kentuckian yelled, as much in surprise as in fight, and attempted to throw it from him; but its arms and legs were wound about him, and it could not be shaken off.

"Who's there? What's the matter?" asked a strong voice, in good, honest English.

"If you are a white man, come and take off this crittur. The devil, or one of his imps, has got holt of me."

"Let him go, Skip! Let him go, you young rascal! Come forward, stranger, and show yourself."

Relieved of his strangling incumbrance, Grinter stepped forward, and saw before him a tall and stalwart white man; but the principal object of his curiosity was the creature that had jumped upon him so strangely and suddenly.

"A nigger boy, by thunder!" he exclaimed. "Is that crittur any way hatched to you, stranger?"

"He is my boy. But how did you come here? If I am not mistaken, this is Sam Grinter, whom I met in Mexico not many months ago."

"That's me, fur sartin. Ain't you Dave Longman, the trader, whose pardner got sculped by the Camanches down thar?"

"The same. Where did you come from, and what are you doing here?"

"I came from Jack Bird's camp, out here. Jack is trappin' beaver in these parts, and I fell in with him as I war crossin' the mountings, and 'lowed to stay with him a while, bein' old friends so. Speakin' of camps, reminds me that thar's a camp of fightin' Camanches, a little way down the valley, and you had better look out fur your sculp."

"Camped there?" asked Longman, relapsing into one of his monosyllabic moods.

"Yes. They 'peared to be fixed up fur passin' the night thar."

"Safe, then."

"Safe enough till mornin' I reckon, and then the thievin' and sculpin' vagabones will need to be looked arter. I wonder what in thunder they are here fur."

"That's so."

"Yes; but that don't seem to satisfy the p'int. You axed me, old hoss, what I war doin' in these parts, and that's the

curiosity of it. What would you think if I should tell you that thar's a cave up here in the mountings, whar the Injuns keep a fire burnin' all the time, day in and day out, through the year?"

"Know it."

"You do? P'raps you know, then, that thar's a white man shet up in that cave, and that the Injuns keep him chained and half naked."

"Yes. Know who?"

"No, I don't. I didn't adzackly believe the story, but 'lowed it mought be one of Jack Bird's big stretchers, though I sot out to go up thar to-night and take a look fur myself. As you know so much about it, p'raps you ken tell who it is."

"Tom Howell."

"The thun-der-ation! You don't mean to say that, now? Tom Howell, who was killed and sculped by the Camanches, down in Mexico, long ago! It cain't be. I saw the red-skins swarmin' around him like buzzards about a dead mule, and he had narry chance fur his life."

"His ring," quietly remarked Longman, handing to Grinter the ring which he had recognized as Howell's.

"Is that his ring? Are you sartin? How did you git it, and what has it got to do with his bein' in the cave?"

"Skip was there, and got it from him."

"Who's Skip? That little nigger? I'm glad to l'arn that the imp of darkness is good fur suthin' besides jumpin' onto folks in the dark and chokin' 'em. I took an awful likin' to that Tom Howell, 'cause he was mighty clever to me, and if it hadn't been fur him I reckon I should never hev found this yere watch, which is jist about the best watch that any mortal human ever kerried, in *this* world. What do you mean to do about his bein' thar, Cap.?"

"Get him out."

"How do you mean to do it? When do you allow to set about it?"

"In the morning."

"Now is the time. I war goin' up thar to-night, and I am mortal anxious to go now, as I have found out who it is. Night gives the best chances, Cap. Let us go up thar now."

"Very well."

"Hev you got any critturs about here? If you hev, you had better hide 'em, or those Camanches mought git holt of 'em."

"All safe. Put out the fire, Skip. Come along."

The fire was extinguished, and Sam Grinter led the way toward the bluff, followed by Longman and the black boy.

CHAPTER VII.

SAM GRINTER SEES SIGHTS.

THE night was quite dark when Grinter and his friends came under the bluff, and the light of the fire could plainly be seen, shining out from the entrance of the cave. They stopped a few moments, to consider what they should do.

"Thar's the hole," said the Kentuckian, "but how are we to git up to it?—that's the question."

"Skip knows the way," suggested Longman.

"Very well; but when we git thar—what shall we do then?"

"What do you say?"

"It's an awful skeery place, as I've heerd tell, and thar's no knowin' what tricks the Injuns hev fixed up to keep folks away from it. Jack Bird says that he tried to look in thar once, and got e'ena'most skeered to death. He didn't say what the matter was, but he 'lowed that he was powerful glad to git away with his life. It seems to me that one of us had better kinder reekenyter the place fust."

"Send Skip."

"That nigger boy may be mighty sharp fur his age and color; but he ain't a white man, and it needs a man, to my notion, to 'tend to that business. If thar's no objection, Cap., I'll go up thar and take a look at the hole, you keepin' handy, so's to help me if any thin' should happen."

"Go, then."

Longman and Skip accompanied the Kentuckian a part of the way up the bluff, and then concealed themselves in a hole

in the rocks, while the self-appointed scout went on toward the cave.

Grinter worked his way upward very slowly, and with all possible caution; for he was very suspicious, if not fearful, of the mysterious cavern, and he had his doubts whether it was exactly what the Scotch call "canny." He did not exactly believe the story that Jack Bird had told him; but he thought it best to act as if he believed it, and his approaches were accordingly made with great regard for his personal safety.

He climbed up until he reached the ledge at which the cave was situated, and then crawled on toward the white light that gleamed brightly from the entrance of the deep recess.

All was silent, and there was no sign of the presence of any human being, except the strange and mysterious fire, toward which Grinter was irresistibly attracted, although he felt concerning it a vague and undefined fear. Like a bird charmed by a serpent, he dreaded that fire, but could not turn his eyes from it.

"This is skeery, fur sartin," he muttered, as he made a brief halt in his crawling. "I wonder what in natur' is inside of that hole? It cain't be that I'm afeard, but I do believe that I never had such a queer feelin' in my life. It must be Jack Bird's hard stories that make me so skeery. Reckon I'd better ax old tickler, and see what she says about it."

He pulled out his big watch, and held it to his ear.

"Blamed if I know whether she says go on, or look out. It's one or t'other, fur sartin, but she ticks mortal queer to-night. I jest wish I could git a look at her face, only oncen. But, I'm bound to go on, fur I've sot my mind onto it, and I promised to do it. Thar's no backin' out, Sam Grinter. You must show that you ain't afeard of witches or widgerds."

Carefully the Kentuckian crawled along the ledge, until he came to the entrance to the cave, where he concealed himself behind a large rock, from which he could see something of what was going on within.

Peering around a corner of the rock, he saw the cavern open before him, with the fire burning brightly at a distance of some thirty feet from the entrance. This fire was burning

on a sort of altar, or table of stone, in front of which two old Indians, as Grinter supposed them to be, were lying on the ground. From the roof and sides of the cave were hanging numerous grotesque images, together with ornaments of gold and silver, the sight of which, as they glistened in the light of the fire, strongly excited the Kentuckian's cupidity, and tempted him to a further investigation of the cave mystery.

As he looked more closely, he perceived another person, seated upon a block of stone, whom he at once decided to be the white man of whom Jack Bird had spoken, for his skin was white, and his hair was long and dark. He was naked from the waist up, and was seated so that Grinter could not see his features, with his head bowed down and covered with his hands.

Grinter thought he would make a little noise, in order to attract the attention of the white man, without awaking the sleeping Indians. Accordingly, he rattled his powder-horn slightly against the barrel of his rifle, and showed his head a little further out at the corner of the rock.

The prisoner started at the noise, slowly raised his head, and looked toward the entrance of the cave.

"It is Cap. Howell, by ginger!" exclaimed the Kentuckian, as he uncoiled himself and stood by the side of the rock.

He stepped forward, as if to enter the cave, when the prisoner shook his head, and held up his hand with a warning gesture.

"Thar's only two of 'em," thought Grinter, as he hesitated, "and this child ort to be a match for two sleepin' red-skins. I really don't see why I shouldn't go in thar and clean 'em out and bring off Cap. Howell. It would give me a mighty good chance to brag over Jack Bird, sartin. I'll try it, by ginger!"

Grasping his rifle, he walked boldly into the cave, stepping lightly as he went, so that he might not awaken the two sleeping Indians.

Hardly had he passed within the shadow of the overhanging rocks, when a cloud of fire and smoke burst up from beneath his feet and all around him, filling the air with a blinding, scorching, stifling, sulphurous vapor. At the same time the fire within blazed up higher than ever, with a red and

unearthly glare, and out of the bowels of the mountain seemed to issue a number of enormous and uncouth forms, clad in fiery garments, with ugly and grotesque features, uttering the most horrible and diabolical noises.

Sam Grinter had been somewhat singed by the cloud of flame that had burst up about him, but he had been much more frightened than hurt. When the apparitions rushed out from the interior of the cavern, his fright was so great that his senses forsook him. With a yell of mortal terror he rushed back from the cave, and rolled over the ledge, down the side of the bluff.

Those who were concealed below, waiting for the Kentuckian, had some knowledge of his disaster, though they could form no idea of what had really happened. They saw the cloud of flame and smoke that burst out of the cave, and heard indistinctly the horrible noises that had so frightened their scout. They heard plainly enough the yell that preceded his sudden departure from the cave, and the rattling of stones and crashing of branches that accompanied his tumble down the bluff.

Longman hurried to the spot where the falling body had descended, followed by Skip, who was always brave enough when he was with his master, and they soon found Grinter, who was lying, bleeding and insensible, near a rock that had stopped his further fall.

"He is dead," said the trader, as he looked at the inanimate form, and noticed the height from which it had fallen; but a further examination convinced him that there was yet life in the Kentuckian, and he applied himself to the work of restoring him.

"Whar's my watch?" asked Grinter, as he opened his eyes, and put his hand to the pocket in which he carried his ponderous timepiece.

It was safe, fortunately, and he uttered a sigh of relief and thankfulness, stretching out his long limbs, and feeling of them to see if they were all there. He had been pretty badly bruised, and the blood flowed freely from one ugly gash, but, as it happened, no bones had been broken.

"What was the matter, Sam?" asked Longman. "What did you see up there?"

"Thar's hell up thar, Cap. Thar ain't no other word for it. It's jest hell, and no mistake. I ain't ashamed to say that I was skeered clean out of my seven senses, and I wonder how I got away. It must hev been old tickler that helped me off, fur mortal crittur couldn't hev done it. Let's leave these diggin's, Cap."

"Not quite yet. You are more scared than hurt, Sam. Tell me what you really saw. I don't believe the place of torment is up here in the mountains."

"Then they've got a branch of it here, sure. Didn't I see the hull rock a-bustin' out in fire?—and didn't I see the live devils a-comin' at me, with thar horns and fiery fixin's?—and didn't I hear 'em yellin' and groanin' and slashin' thar teeth? You needn't talk to me about hell, Cap.! I've been thar oncem."

"I suppose the red-skins know how to flash powder and make red fire as well as we do, and I saw some of their ugly masks during their performances in the pueblo. Did you see any thing of Tom Howell?"

"Yes, Cap., I saw him and knew him. He is thar yet, if it ain't his ghost; but he is half naked and chained, jest as Jack Bird said, and he don't look a bit like a mortal crittur, and I reckon he was killed in that scrimmage down in Mexico, sure enough."

"All right. I will have him out of there, as sure as my name is Dave Longman. Those red-skins are better hands at scaring folks than fighting them, I reckon. How are your legs, Sam? Can you walk?"

"Yes, a little; but I am mighty stiff. What do you mean to do?"

"To go to some quiet spot where we can rest until morning. The best plan will be, I think, to try the Indian fashion, and burst in upon them just before daylight, when sleep is sweet to them."

"You surely don't mean to go up thar and try to git into that cave?" said Grinter, in astonishment.

"But I do," replied the trader, suddenly becoming scarce of words.

When they reached the quiet spot that had been spoken of, Grinter endeavored to dissuade Longman from making

another attempt to enter the cave and penetrate its mysteries; but the worthy trader was not to be moved.

"Tom Howell is in there, and he must be got out," was the quiet reply with which he met all opposition.

He waited until about two hours before dawn, when he awoke Skip, and told him to go up to the cave and see what was to be seen there.

The boy returned, after a while, and reported that all was quiet above, and that he had noticed nothing special, except that the white man seemed to be loose, for he had seen him lift up his chain, and shake his foot as if it was free.

"I hope it may be so," said Longman. "It is time to start. Come, Sam."

Sam Grinter earnestly protested against being dragged into another expedition to that horrible place, and begged his companions to desist from their undertaking; but Longman smiled at the idea of danger, and ordered him to get up and follow.

"Come along, Sam," said he. "I will see that you are not hurt. If you get scared to death, it will be your own fault."

Skip went on boldly, though Grinter was inclined to hang back and keep in the rear, and thus they reached the ledge, and slowly picked their way to the cave. All was quiet, as Skip had reported, and nothing was to be seen but the fire burning brightly in the interior of the cave.

Longman crept toward the entrance until he could look within, for he wanted to see the prisoner. He soon caught sight of the white man, who was half naked, and seated on a stone as usual, but he raised his head, and looked around the cave and toward the opening. Longman at once recognized the wasted features of Tom Howell, and turned his face so that it could be seen.

There was a joyful light in the eyes of the prisoner as he recognized his old friend, and it was with a fierce smile that he held up a fragment of his chain and shook it. Longman immediately stepped back to where he had left Grinter and Skip.

"Now is our time," said he. "Tom is loose, and perhaps he may be able to help us. It is a good thing to have a friend in the enemy's camp. All we have to do is, to rush in and take him out."

Grinter strongly objected to going any further; but the trader partly coaxed and partly dragged him up to the opening, when he positively refused to attempt to enter.

"You ought to do it, Sam, and you know you ought," said Longman. "When a friend is in trouble, it is no time to hang back and be afraid of a few dried-up old Indians. I wonder what that watch of yours says. Let me look at it."

The Kentuckian pulled out his "turnip," and handed it to Longman, who looked at it a moment and then threw it far into the interior of the cave.

"It says *go in*, and you've got to follow it!"

"If that thar watch is lost or hurt, you'll hev to suffer fur it," muttered Grinter, as he rushed after his companion into the cavern.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SLAVE OF THE FIRE.

Tom Howell never knew what induced the Camanches to spare him, when they surrounded him on the Mexican plain and had him completely at their mercy. It was probably some sudden freak of generosity that saved his life, or the interposition of Gabriel Yanes, who was the leader of the party of savages.

His senses had deserted him, providentially, when he fired his last shot, and when the band of yelling demons closed in upon him with their spears. He knew nothing more until he found himself lying in a horse-litter, traveling at a rate of speed that was very uncomfortable to him, and suffering severely with his wounded leg.

After a while the party halted by a watercourse, which Howell knew to be in the vicinity of Jarral Grande, and he was left there in charge of two Indians, while the remainder of the savages, led by Gabriel, went off on an expedition.

When they returned, he knew that they had captured and ransacked the village, for they were bloody and excited, and they brought back scalps and many articles of plunder. He

also knew that they had taken some captives, but he was not permitted to see them. His heart was greatly troubled, for he had no doubt that Gabriel Yanes had at last accomplished his purpose, that he had destroyed the village of Jarral Grande, and had carried off the girl whom he loved so madly.

After a brief rest, Gabriel set off toward the north, with the greater part of the warriors, leaving the rest to bring on the white prisoner at their leisure. Howell was certain that he saw a white woman in the party as he rode away, and he was sure that it was Marita Ortiz, although he was unable to get a glimpse of her face.

As soon as Howell's leg was a little better, his captors compelled him to mount a horse and ride with them, although every step was painful to him. He was carefully watched, and could get no opportunity to escape, even if he had been in a condition to avail himself of such a chance.

The Indians rode at "short camps," and kept on toward the north from the province of Chihuahua, instead of turning to the east and crossing the Rio Grande where they had come into Mexico.

Howell perceived that they were tired of guarding and watching him, and that they were thinking seriously of putting him to death, in order to get rid of the trouble of taking care of him.

Before they had fully made up their minds to the murder, however, they were met by a large party of Moquis, with whom they were on friendly terms. Among the Moquis were several old men, and a long palaver and smoke ensued, the object of which was, as it turned out, the purchase and sale of Tom Howell, as the Moquis were very anxious, at that time, to get possession of a white slave.

The palaver ended in a satisfactory bargain, and in the turning over of Tom Howell to the Moquis, as their property, bought and paid for. The Camanches then turned to the eastward, and went back to their own country by way of the pueblo of Zuñi.

The young American was taken still further to the northwest by his owners, and was brought to a large and neat town, one of the pueblos of the Moquis, where he was well treated and carefully nursed until his wounds became healed;

but he was kept a close prisoner, not being allowed to ramble about the town, or even to leave the house in which he was confined.

The winter was nearly half gone when he was pronounced cured, and then there was a grand feast-day in the pueblo, attended by many strange ceremonies and performances. A solemn procession was formed, at the head of which were a number of old men, with Howell in the midst of them, mounted on a donkey, blindfolded, and covered with a white robe.

The young gentleman could not help thinking that he must cut a very ridiculous figure; but he consoled himself with the belief that no mortal eyes, except those of the Indians, were witnesses of his calamities. He could not imagine what could be the object of the exhibition, or to what fate he was destined, unless it was intended to offer him up as a sacrifice, as he had heard strange accounts of the existence of such customs among the Pueblo Indians. He could not contemplate such a fate without a shudder, but he resolved that he would not despair until it came to the worst, and even then he was determined to make such an effort as he might to save his life.

The procession went far up into the mountains, and at length reached a place where the prisoner was taken from his donkey and compelled to walk. When he was again halted, the bandage was removed from his eyes, and he found himself in a cavern in which a fire was burning brightly, surrounded by the white-robed old men.

Here his position was explained to him, and he was glad to learn that he was not to be put to death, although the life before him was by no means a pleasant one.

The old men, as they said, were priests of the Moquis, whose duty it was to guard the sacred fire that was always kept burning in the cave. Their Great Father, who lives where the sun rises, had given them to understand that they must have a man with a white skin to tend the fire and keep it burning, as they would thereby avoid many of the calamities which he would otherwise bring upon them. They had captured a wandering hunter, whom they had kept for that purpose during several years; but he had died, and their people

had been severely afflicted by the Great Father while they were unable to supply his place. They had gone out to search for another white man, when they met the band of Camanches with Howell in their hands. They had purchased him from his captors, and had solemnly dedicated him to the fire as its servant. Thereafter he must consider it the duty of his life to keep the sacred fire burning brightly. He would be properly cared for, but well guarded, and his guards would see to it that he did his duty; for, if the fire should be suffered to go out, some dreadful misfortune would befall their people.

Howell was then chained to a large block of stone, and his duties began. He was well fed and kindly treated, as the Indians had promised that he should be; but he was a captive, unable to move more than ten feet from the block to which he was chained, and the canker of captivity soon began to eat into his soul. He pined away rapidly, and became emaciated and faded, like a plant that has accidentally taken root in some dark recess, shut out from the sweet influences of the sunshine and the atmosphere.

It was useless to think of escape; for the chain with which he was bound was a strong one, and he had no instrument of any kind with which he might hope to sever it. Besides, the cave was constantly occupied by four old men and a stout warrior, who were all armed, and who could have overpowered him instantly.

He had been thus imprisoned about a month, when the cave was visited by a white man, some wandering hunter or trapper who had been attracted by the light of the fire. He came carefully crawling up to the entrance, and Howell hoped, as he saw him, that his situation might become known, and that he might be befriended by the white stranger. But he was also seen by the Indians, who prepared to give him such a reception as should effectually frighten him away.

They scattered a quantity of powder about the entrance of the cave, and lighted it as he was about to step in. At the same time they threw on the fire something that caused the flames to assume a red and unnatural hue, and showed themselves in the light, their faces covered with horrid masks, making unearthly noises upon ram's horns. The ugly faces and the unearthly noises were frightful enough, and it was no wonder

to Howell that the daring intruder uttered a yell of terror and disappeared. When the warrior rushed out with his spear uplifted, he reported that the white man was nowhere to be seen, and that he had probably fallen over the cliff.

Howell did not expect to see another white man in the neighborhood of the cave, for he knew that he who had ventured thither, if he escaped with his life, would spread such a report as would cause the superstitious trappers and hunters to shun the spot as the dwelling-place of evil spirits.

The next episode in the uneventful life of the prisoner occurred at the opening of spring, when there came to the cave a procession of young women, headed by a number of old men, and accompanied by drums, that were beaten vigorously during the march. The men wore hideous masks, and the faces of the young women were covered with visors formed of slender willow twigs.

As they entered the cave, bearing gifts to propitiate their Great Father, or the spirit of the fire, one of the girls dropped her visor, and Howell caught sight of a white-skin, features of great beauty, and brilliant black eyes. It was but a momentary glimpse—for he was so weak and emaciated that the sudden excitement caused him to faint—but he recognized the never-to-be-forgotten face of Marita Ortiz, which beamed upon him for an instant like a dream of heaven.

When he came to his senses, the procession had passed out, and there was no one in the cave but himself and his everyday companions. As he looked wistfully toward the entrance, wondering whether the sight of that fair face had been a vision or a reality, he perceived a black boy peering from behind a rock.

The black boy made signs of friendship, and Howell gladly answered them; but he was unable to communicate with him any further, except to signify his wish to possess a knife that the boy had in his girdle, offering in exchange a ring, the only piece of property that had been left to him. The exchange was effected, and Howell joyfully caught the knife, which he concealed in his clothes until he could contrive a better hiding-place under the stone to which he was chained.

The possession of the knife was a source of great gratification to Howell for he saw in it the means by which, if rightly

used, he might regain his liberty. He also hoped that the boy, who had seemed to be so friendly, might make known his situation to some white men who would be willing and able to befriend him. The hope of liberty soon brought back his strength and energy, and all his thoughts were directed to that end, except when he was thinking of his brief vision of Marita Ortiz.

He contrived to notch the blade of the knife until it would answer the purpose of a file, and worked with it upon the ring around his ankle, every moment when the attention of his guards was not upon him.

He had plenty of time for this purpose, as the Indians were much less wary than they had been during the earlier portion of his captivity, and he succeeded so well in his labor that he had nearly cut through the ring when Sam Grinter made his visit to the cave.

He easily recognized the Kentuckian, and tried to warn him against the plans which the Indians, who had also seen him, had laid to frighten him away. Although Grinter had retreated so precipitately, he felt that he had a friend near at hand, who might assist him if he could effect his escape from the cave. He applied himself, therefore, with renewed diligence, to the work of sawing through the ring, and soon had the satisfaction of knowing that he was free from his fetters.

Hardly was this accomplished, when he was again rejoiced by a visit from the black boy, who told him, in that language of signs so well understood by those who have been much among the Indians, that help was at hand, and that he must wait patiently. Howell held up his chain and his foot, to show that he was free to act, and gave the boy to understand that he was ready to help those who should come to help him.

When Longman and the Kentuckian made their appearance, the Indians were again on the alert, and prepared for them the same sort of reception as that by which Jack Bird and Grinter had been driven away.

The good sense of Longman, however, had divined the secret of their mysterious proceedings, and he rushed boldly into the cave, unmindful of the flashing powder, the red fire, the ugly masks and the horrid hootings.

The prisoner, perceiving that the time had come for him to

assist his friends, knocked down with his broken iron the warrior, who stood ready with his spear to defend the sacred fire. The old Indians, perceiving that these invaders were not to be frightened away, fell on their knees before them when they entered the cave, begging them not to extinguish the fire.

David Longman greeted his friend most affectionately, and Sam Grinter bestowed upon him a bear's hug. The Indians were not harmed, as Howell said that they had treated him kindly, and their sacred fire was left to burn undisturbed. The Kentuckian wished to appropriate some of the gold and silver ornaments that hung about the cave; but he was prevented by Longman and Howell, who told him that the Indians would be very indignant if any of the articles which they considered sacred were carried away, and that it was useless to excite their animosity.

As for Tom Howell, his only wish was to get away from the cave as soon as possible, and he was so overjoyed at having recovered his liberty, that he felt in a good humor with everybody. Sam Grinter found his watch uninjured and "still a-runnin'," and was somewhat pacified, although he could not entirely forgive Longman for the liberty that he had taken with it.

The released prisoner and his friends left the cave, and hastened down the cliff and along the side of the mountain, until they reached a point from which they had an extensive view of the plain below, with the town of the Moquis shining from a bluff in the distance. Here they stopped to rest. The sun had risen, and all objects below could be plainly distinguished.

As Howell reclined upon a rock, rejoicing in his freedom and gladly drinking in the beauty of the scene, he saw a company of women, led by two Indian men, mounted on donkeys, riding across the plain toward the hills. As they drew nearer he thought that he saw a white woman among them, and he instantly became excited, thinking that it might be the same whose face he had seen in the cave.

"Look, Longman!" he exclaimed. "Is there not a white girl among those women? I am sure there is, and that I have seen her before. I wish I had a glass, so that I might see her more plainly."

"Here's one," replied the trader, drawing a small spy-glass from his pocket, and handing it to his friend.

"It is she!" said Howell, as he brought the instrument to bear upon the party below. "It is the face I saw in the cave. It is Marita Ortiz!"

"Thun-der-ation!" exclaimed Sam Grinter. "How did *she* git here?"

"That is more than I can tell. She is a prisoner, of course. Let us go down and capture her."

"Hold on!" suggested Longman. "Somebody ahead of us, Tom."

At that moment a party of six Indians, well mounted on horses, burst out from a grove near the foot of the mountain, and pounced upon the women and their conductors. In an instant the white girl was seized, taken from her donkey, mounted on a horse, and hurried away, while her companions, who had not been able to make any resistance, were left screaming and lamenting.

"I know those red-skins," said Sam Grinter. "They are the same Camanches that I saw camped in the valley last night."

"What shall we do?" anxiously asked Howell. "Have you any horses near here, Longman? Let us mount and pursue them."

"It would be useless," replied the trader. "My horses are some two miles from here. Besides, the Indians are well mounted, and you are not strong enough to follow them now."

"But something must be done. I can't see her carried off in that way without trying to aid her."

"I will send. Here, Skip! Take a horse and follow that trail."

The black boy nodded his head, with a look of intelligence, and was off like a shot.

CHAPTER IX.

MARITA.

Poor Marita Ortiz! She, in common with the rest of the villagers of Jarral Grande, had no suspicion that any enemies were in their vicinity, until the Camanches burst upon them like a whirlwind, sweeping every thing before them, and spreading death and destruction as they went.

Gabriel Yanes had laid his plans this time with a determination to succeed, and had carried them out rapidly and remorselessly. He had suffered the Indians to persuade him to turn aside to attack Howell and Grinter, because they hoped to gain a good booty by the capture of those travelers and their animals; but this had caused only a temporary delay, and he pushed on to execute his purpose of gaining possession of Marita Ortiz.

To accomplish this object he knew that he would be obliged to shed the blood of those who had formerly been his neighbors and acquaintances, and to desolate hearths that had once been familiar and friendly to him; but his mad and reckless passion could not be curbed by any such considerations. Love and revenge, the most powerful motives that animate human nature, inflamed his breast, and drove him on to the bitter and bloody end. Like other renegades, he hated those who had formerly been his friends, with an intensity of hatred surpassing that of the savages with whom he associated himself, and he was even more cruel and pitiless than his barbarous companions.

Halting for a while in concealment at a short distance from the village, he set out with his chosen warriors about two hours before dawn, and fell upon the Mexicans when they were wrapped in slumber, dreaming of any thing but the ferocious foe that was already at their doors.

He gained an easy victory — if the rout and slaughter of those unarmed and terrified villagers could be called a victory — and gave up the town to the pillage of his savage followers.

while he went straightway to the house, so well known and remembered, in which Marita Ortiz dwelt with her mother. In fact, he could not have restrained the Indians from the indulgence of their brutal and fiendish instincts if he had been so minded, and a scene of bloodshed and horror ensued, which it would be too painful to chronicle.

Marita Ortiz awoke to find herself in the power of the man whom she feared and detested above all others, and was compelled to dress herself and accompany him, though she would have preferred death to such a fate. He saw her mother murdered before her eyes without raising his hand to save her and Marita's prayers and entreaties were answered only by mockery and derision.

When the sack and slaughter were finished, and the savages, glutted with blood, and loaded with scalps and plunder, set out on their return, Marita was mounted on her own horse and forced to go with them. She went with a breaking heart, for she felt that she had lost all on earth that was dear to her, and that she had nothing to look forward to but a life of misery and torment. Escape was out of the question, and there was no possibility of a rescue; for the savages always came and went with impunity, carrying off their captives and their booty without being molested by the Mexicans.

The party traveled by easy journeys, although their progress was quite rapid. Howell had been left behind, to follow more leisurely, partly because he was an incumbrance, and partly because Gabriel Yanes did not wish him to see his fair prisoner. If he had known of Howell's acquaintance with Marita, or had suspected the feelings which he entertained toward her, the young American would have been left on the road as food for the buzzards.

Marita was well cared for and kindly treated by Gabriel, because he really loved her, with all the strength of his fierce and ardent nature. It is possible that he might, in earlier days, have gained her love, if he had been able to check his ungovernable passions, which had always inspired her with a fear that ultimately increased to absolute horror.

Gabriel led his band in a northerly direction, up into New Mexico, for reasons of his own which will be hereafter explained. As soon as he had got fairly into the country of the

Moquis, he was joined by a much larger party, under the command of one of the principal chiefs of the Tennawas, the tribe with which he had connected himself.

This chief remonstrated with him very severely concerning the course that he was taking, and ordered him to turn to the eastward and lead his warriors back into their own country. Gabriel was not at all disposed to obey, and high words ensued between him and the chief, which ended in his being deprived of his command, stripped of his dignities, and, in military parlance, "reduced to the ranks." As the authority of the chiefs was supreme, and his own party was largely in the minority, he was obliged to submit, and he did so with a very bad grace, vowing that he would be amply revenged at his own time and in his own way.

This disagreement, with the discussion that attended it, occurred at night, and was witnessed by nearly all the warriors, many of whom took part in the stormy proceedings. They were so absorbed in it, in fact, that Marita was imperfectly guarded and was finally left without any guard, as the warrior who had been placed in charge of her concluded that she would not be so foolish as to stray away in that desert, where she must inevitably starve to death, and had therefore followed the bent of his own inclinations by going to take part in the palaver.

But Marita was not afraid of being lost, did not fear starvation, had no dread of death. Any fate, she was sure, would be preferable to that which awaited her if she should remain in the power of her renegade lover. She saw a chance to escape from him, and quickly determined to avail herself of it.

She had been riding her own horse, a splendid sorrel, as fleet as the wind, whose swiftness had already been once tried in running away from Gabriel Yanes. She knew where he was tethered, and thither she crept, as silently and stealthily as she could.

She unhitched his bridle, and led him quietly away from the camp, until she was out of sight and hearing of the savage Camanches and her dreaded lover. Then she mounted, and gave her sorrel the rein.

"On, Panchito! Anda-a!" she exclaimed, as she galloped wildly over the broad plain, with terror and captivity behind her, and blessed liberty before her.

The sorrel seemed to be animated by the same feelings as herself, for he entered into the spirit of the occasion, and fairly flew. Marita had never known him to travel at such a pace, but he could not go faster than she wished him to.

She had reason to believe that the Indians would travel in a south-easterly direction, and she, therefore, rode steadily toward the north-west, guiding her course by stars which she well knew. The night was clear and starlit, and, whenever she reached an eminence, she rode to the top of it, and looked to see if there were any signs of pursuit.

She saw nothing to trouble her. Only the vast plain was behind her, and before her were rugged mountain ranges, in which she hoped to find refuge from pursuit, even if she must perish among them—to find liberty, even if she must lose life. She was sure that the Camanches would not diverge so far from their route to pursue her; but she feared that Gabriel and some of his own band might do so, and she knew how well they could follow a trail and how swift their horses were, though she did not suppose that any of them possessed the wind and mettle of Panchito, who still flew on unweariedly.

Day succeeded to night, and the speed of the sorrel began to flag, and Marita found herself growing weak and weary, as she rode into a pleasant valley in the midst of the mountains.

She had taken no provision with her, as there had been none within reach when she left the camp of the Indians. She had not thought of such a necessity, in fact, as her mind had been wholly occupied by the one idea of flight, of escape from the detested Gabriel. As the morning wore away, she felt the lack of nourishment. Her long and rapid ride at night, with the want of sleep and food, had so completely exhausted her, that she felt ready to fall from her horse at any moment.

She rode on, however, until she reached a glen that seemed to offer a good concealment, and she entered it gladly, dismounting from Panchito, and leaving him at liberty to pick up such sustenance as he could find. A little spring trickled through the glen, and she knelt down and drank a deep draught of the cool water. Hardly had she finished drinking, when she laid down by the side of a rock, and was asleep almost as soon as her head touched the ground.

When she awoke from a troubled dream, in which she had

fancied that she was again in the power of the relentless Gabriel and his red-skin companions, she was terrified by the thought that the dream had become a reality, for she found herself confronted by two Indians, an old man and a young man, who seemed to be hesitating whether to awake her.

She was soon reassured, for she easily perceived, when her eyes were fairly open, that they were not Camanches, and that neither of them bore any resemblance to Gabriel. Their skin was much lighter than that of any Indians she had yet encountered, and their dress was entirely different from that of the wild Camanches. The old man, too, had a very mild and benevolent countenance, and the handsome features of the young man were quite princely in their nobility.

Who and what could they be? Marita was amazed at their appearance, and could find no answer to the question which she thus asked herself.

They were friends, without doubt, for they spoke to her kindly, although she did not understand a word of their language. She knew, from their looks and their tones, that they had no intention of harming her, but wished to befriend and assist her.

They resorted to the language of signs, so well understood by all Indians, and a means of communication was soon established between Marita and her dusky friends, for such they proved to be.

She easily made them understand that she was tired and hungry, and they immediately produced from their bags some guavas and corn bread, which refreshment was very acceptable to her. They then caught Panchito, who was close at hand, and directed her to mount, signifying that they would take her where she would find shelter and food and friends.

She was glad enough to obey, and the young man, who had been gazing at her with an expression of the most intense admiration, walked by the side of her horse, while the old man led the way out of the glen.

CHAPTER X.

THE PET OF THE PUEBLO.

MARITA was taken down the mountain to a large plain, where she saw a lofty bluff in the distance. The beams of the setting sun, striking on the bluff, were reflected from the white walls of what seemed to be a city there in the wilderness.

Marita was astonished, and pointed to the object of her wonder, when her conductors gave her to understand that what seemed to be a city was such in reality, that they lived there, and that their fathers had inhabited it since a period beyond the memory of man.

She was still more astonished, after she had climbed the bluff and entered the town, to see its neat and regular streets, and its rows of well-built houses, with no entrance that she could perceive. The inhabitants crowded around her, evincing curiosity and excitement even greater than her own, for they had never seen a white woman before.

She was taken into the house of those who had brought her out from the mountains, an abundance of such provisions as they possessed was set before her, and nothing more was done or said until the beautiful white stranger had eaten as much as she would.

Marita thought that she had good reason to be thankful, and she was very grateful to that kind Providence that had protected her thus far. She had been delivered from the hands of the Camanches, and from the more dreadful power of Gabriel Yanes, whose love was terrible to her. She had been preserved from starvation, and friends had been raised up to her in the wilderness, when she thought that she must surely perish—friends who were kind and loving to her, and who promised to protect and cherish her. She could hardly be better off, she thought, now that her mother was dead and no one was left to care for her, than with these kind Indians, who could not rightly be called savages.

Her life was, indeed, very pleasant among the Moquis. She

became at once the pet of the pueblo, the wonder and the admiration of everybody in the town. If she was not really looked upon as a superior being, she was respected and cared for as if she had been one. All vied in efforts to please her, and she was allowed to go where she chose and do as she chose, for the Indians had no fear that she would stray from the town into the inhospitable desert.

There was one exception, however, to the liberty which she was allowed. Whenever a white man happened to stray into the pueblo—which was a very unfrequent occurrence—she was shut up in the house, and not permitted to show herself outside of it until he was gone. This seclusion was caused, probably, by the jealousy of her protectors, who feared that the sight of one of the white race might bring longings for a return to her own people, and that she might thus be stolen or in some way taken from them.

When Tom Howell was brought in, she was kept housed up during the whole time that he remained in the pueblo although he was also closely confined. The Indians were not willing that there should be the least danger of her holding communication with him.

When he was solemnly dedicated to the service of the fire, and was taken out to the cave in the mountains, she was not permitted to join the procession or take part in the ceremonies, although she was always considered indispensable in their festivities and religious exercises. She knew what was going on, however, for she had easily learned the language of the pueblo, and she had her female confidants, who told her that a handsome young white man had been purchased from the Camanches, who was to be shut up in a cave in the mountains to tend the sacred fire, in place of one who had died.

Marita felt very sorry for the poor fellow, and she wished that she could see him and help him to escape the fate to which he was doomed; but she did not imagine that he could be a person in whom she had any special interest, and she kept her sympathy locked up in her own breast.

It is not to be supposed that all the young men in the pueblo contented themselves with simply admiring the beauty of the Mexican girl. There was one, in particular, who felt

for her a warmer sentiment than admiration, and who showed it in every way that he could, without making an actual declaration of love.

This was Ossoti, the young man who, with his father Mareeno, had found her when she was sleeping in the glen in the mountains. She had remained an inmate of Mareeno's house, for the old man and his son belonged to what was known as the deer race, and were so highly respected in consequence of their descent, that no objection was made when they signified their intention of keeping the white woman in their family.

Ossoti was a very fine specimen of his race. He was tall and straight, with regular features, fine eyes, and an expression of great intelligence. It was not at all presumptuous in him, considering his handsome appearance and good family, to fall in love with Marita Ortiz. He was her instructor in the language of his people, and the intimacy established between them grew closer and closer, until it strengthened into love on the part of Ossoti, and he felt that life would be valueless to him unless he could make the white maiden his own.

There was one obstacle in the way of his hopes—one barrier that it was hard to pass. "Courting" is not one of the institutions of the Moquis who live in towns. In fact, it is not the custom for a young man to ask the hand of a young woman in marriage, and one who should take such a course would be looked upon with as much contempt as a white woman would if she should make a similar proposition to a man whom she fancied. On the contrary, the maiden selects the youth whom she fancies, and her father proposes the match to the father of the young man. As this proposal is never refused, the girls have the "game in their own hands," and may be supposed to be much better off in this particular than their more civilized sisters.

It was true that Marita had no father, and that the father of Ossoti stood toward her in the relation of a parent, but that did not help the matter; for Mareeno, as the parent *pro tem.* of Marita, could not propose the match to himself as the father of Ossoti, until the maiden should signify her desire that he should do so.

Nothing remained for the young man, therefore, except to show Marita, by every means in his power, how much he loved her, and to win her affection in return, in the hope that she would thus be reduced to prefer the request which he so eagerly desired her to make.

But Marita showed no disposition to return his love. She was very friendly toward him, and treated him as if he was her brother; but there was no evidence that he had awakened any deeper feeling in her heart.

Ossoti persevered in his silent love-making until he came to the conclusion that nothing would ever be effected in that way, and he boldly resolved to disregard the customs of his people and the opinion of the pueblo, and to declare himself openly. Accordingly, he told Marita how he loved her, pretty much after the manner of youths with paler faces, and begged her to love him in return, assuring her that his life would be miserable without her.

Marita listened to him with interest, but without much emotion. It was not the first time that such a declaration had been made to her, but she did not know how to reply to it, as she really felt an affection for Ossoti, though not such as she would like to feel toward a person whom she desired to marry.

"I love my brother," she said. "He has been very kind to me, and I should be ungrateful indeed if I did not love him. I love Mareeno as my father, and Ossoti as my brother. Is not that enough?"

The young Indian protested that it was not enough, by any means; that he wished her to love him with a warmer and stronger affection—such as his own; such an affection as would induce her to ask his father for his hand in marriage, according to the custom of his people.

"My brother will wait," said Marita, very kindly, for she thought it would be ungrateful to refuse Ossoti even what he asked. "My brother will wait until he knows me better. After six moons have passed, if he does not change, I shall feel more able to answer him as he wishes me to."

With this partial promise the young Indian was forced to be contented. As for Marita, a circumstance soon occurred which drove Ossoti and his love completely out of her thoughts.

She learned that there was a white man in the town—an American—a trader who wished to sell merchandise to the people. When she heard of a trader, she immediately thought of the young American who had visited her at Jarral Grande; though she could not hope that he had wandered out there into the wilderness. She wished to see him, but was kept so closely housed up that she could hardly see even the sunshine.

She heard, also, that the stranger had not been permitted to offer his wares for sale, as it was a sort of feast-day in the pueblo, and she was to take part in a procession, that was to go out that day, to carry offerings to the cave of the sacred fire. This, she hoped, might give her an opportunity to see the stranger.

When the procession stopped in front of the house of the cacique, she saw a white man seated upon the roof, gazing at the strange sight, and she was disappointed, for the stranger was entirely unknown to her.

She wished to attract his attention, however, and accordingly dropped, as if by accident, the mask which had concealed her features. He saw her, and started, as if he would have approached her; but her visor was quickly replaced, and the procession moved on, and she saw him no more.

There remained another excitement for her. She had not forgotten the white prisoner who had been taken to the cave in the mountains, and who was doomed to be the slave of the fire during the remainder of his miserable life. She hoped to see him, though she could not hope to help him, and she wisely kept her thoughts to herself.

She did see him, as soon as the procession entered the cave. He was chained to a rock, and was looking so wan and wretched that tears of pity started into her eyes. She looked at him more closely, and thought that she recognized those wasted features. She could not be certain, for he was so greatly changed; but she believed that he was Tom Howell, the young American who had so often occupied her thoughts of late.

Concealing her agitation, she waited until she came nearer to him, and dropped her mask as she had dropped it in the town. He must have recognized her, for he started wildly,

and fell on the floor of the cave in a faint. Again her visor was quickly replaced, and she was forced to leave the cave with the other girls.

It was a mingled feeling of joy and pain that filled her breast as she returned to the pueblo. She was sure that she had found Tom Howell, and that he had recognized her; but, in what a situation had she found him! She wished that she could release him. She thought she would gladly perish with him, if she could only release him from that servitude which must be worse than death. The more she thought of it, the more impossible it seemed to her to do any thing to aid him.

She could do nothing then, certainly; for the Indians had become displeased with her, on account of her evident endeavor to make herself known to the two Americans. They knew well enough that it could not be by accident that she had twice dropped her mask where her face could be seen by white men. She was severely lectured, therefore, and was shut up for a while as a punishment for her indiscretion.

When she next found an opportunity to breathe the fresh air, she went on an expedition for the purpose of procuring certain herbs, which, as the Indians believed, when burned, would win the favor of their Great Mother, and propitiate the wrath of their Great Father. It was necessary that these herbs should be gathered by the maidens, that they should be gathered in the moonlight and at a particular phase of the moon.

Marita went forth on this nightly expedition with several other girls, attended by two old men. They had accomplished their object and were returning across the plain to the pueblo, when one of them noticed some men on the side of the mountain, whom she pointed out to her companions.

The Mexican girl at once saw that they were white men, and she thought that she recognized more than one of them. She was so agitated that she did not know what to do, and seriously thought of dashing off from the group and flying to them for protection.

She had but little time to think; for, before she could collect her senses sufficiently to decide what ought to be done, there was a rapid rush, and the party was surrounded by half a dozen painted and fierce Camanches.

There was no effort at resistance, and Marita did not faint and could not scream. It was with a feeling of unutterable horror and despair that she looked up when she was seized, and found herself in the grasp of her enraged lover, Gabriel Yanes.

CHAPTER XI.

A RED AVENGER.

WHEN Gabriel Yanes found himself obliged to submit to the authority of Black Horse, the Camanche chief, instead of being suffered to pursue his own plans, which did not include a return to the Camanche nation, he was so full of disappointment and indignation that he could hardly contain himself. He was compelled to bottle up his wrath, however, and to keep it tightly corked, as Black Horse was supreme for the time, and might heap upon him further indignities, if not bodily injuries.

He ventured to propose to the chief that he would like to separate himself from the band and from the Camanche nation, if he could be permitted to go his own way, with the white girl who was his prisoner.

This request only served to increase the ire of Black Horse, who had already cast favorable eyes upon Marita Ortiz, and who was prepared to take possession of her, if his refractory subject should show any symptoms of rebellion.

He informed the renegade that when he connected himself with the Camanches, who were undoubtedly the greatest and most powerful nation in the world, he had taken upon himself duties and a character which he could not throw off at pleasure. He had already done wrong, in undertaking an expedition on his own account, without the permission of his superiors, and he must return to be tried by them for misconduct. If he refused to do so, he must be tied and taken back by force. His white prisoner, also, must accompany the chief and his party.

Gabriel turned white with rage, but he could do nothing,

except to declare his submission, and to express himself as entirely satisfied with the orders of the chief. When the council was broken up, he went directly to the place where he had left Marita. He was in one of his most savage moods, and there is no knowing to what extent he might have vented his rage upon her, if he had not, fortunately, found her absent.

On looking about for her, he soon became impressed by the suspicion that she had escaped, and this suspicion became a certainty when he discovered that her guard had left her, and that her horse was gone.

He easily tracked her to the place where the horses had been fastened, and followed the trail of the animal until he perceived that it led across the plain toward the north-west.

There could be no doubt that she had fled, and it was equally evident that it would be difficult to overtake her, for he well knew the speed of the horse on which she was mounted. He could only hope to recover her by following her trail patiently, until she should be so overcome by exhaustion and the lack of food that she would be obliged to stop to rest, when he might hope to come upon her.

He ran back to the chief in a state bordering on distraction, told him of Marita's disappearance, cursed the carelessness of those who had been left to guard her, and asked for a horse on which to pursue her.

Black Horse took the matter very coolly, for he perceived that he had another good opportunity to ill-treat the renegade—whom he hated, by the way, and with good reason. He was secretly glad at the disappearance of the white girl, who would only have been an incumbrance to his party, and he thought that the satisfaction of knowing that Gabriel had lost her would be even better than the satisfaction of gaining her himself.

"My young men," he said, "will pursue the white prisoner. If she has not gone too far, they will overtake her and bring her back. If she has gone too far, she must not be followed, for she is not worth the loss of time that it would cost to recover her. My brother will stay with me, for I am afraid that he might wander too far and get lost."

The conclusion of this speech was accompanied by a perceptible and malicious sneer. The "brother" was obliged to comply with the direction of the chief, though there was any

thing but a brotherly expression on his face as he went away, raging and fuming, feeling that it would be the greatest pleasure of his life to ride the Black Horse to his death.

A few young warriors went in pursuit of Marita ; but they soon returned, as Gabriel had supposed they would, reporting that the fugitive had been riding at headlong speed, and that it was impossible to overtake her.

Gabriel again requested that he might be allowed to separate from the rest of the band and follow her alone ; but he might better have held his peace, for the chief was only too glad of an opportunity to refuse his request.

Nothing further of any moment occurred, except the arrival of Tom Howell, who was soon sold by Black Horse to a party of Moquis, and the Camanches returned to their own country, Gabriel being carefully watched on the journey, lest he should make an endeavor to escape.

After their arrival in the Camanche country, Gabriel had the gratification of enjoying a triumph over his enemy, Black Horse, which partially atoned for some of the indignities and discomforts that he had suffered, though it could not repay him for the loss of his fair captive.

He had a sort of trial for misconduct, at the instigation of Black Horse, in having undertaken an expedition against a Mexican village, on his own account, without the permission of his chief. In this he came out victorious and triumphant, for the expedition had been successful, securing a number of scalps and a great deal of booty. With the Camanches, as with more civilized people, success was the test of merit. Gabriel was tried by this standard, and not only was his course fully vindicated, but he was restored to his former dignities, and Black Horse was reprimanded for the severity with which he had treated such a worthy warrior.

This was a source of some satisfaction to Gabriel, who had been for a long time at enmity with Black Horse, and the cause of the enmity may as well be explained here.

After Gabriel had come among the Camanches, he soon acquired the name of being an excellent warrior, for he was brave and cruel, dashing in his exploits and fierce in action. He belonged to that portion of the middle division of the Camanches which was called the Tennawas. This band was

ruled by one principal chief, but was divided into several smaller bands, commanded by subordinate chiefs, or captains, and Black Horse was one of these chiefs.

Gabriel was an ambitious young man. Although he had joined the savages he had no intention of remaining among them in a subordinate capacity, of being considered as a private soldier, or merely as a brave. He aspired to become one of the chiefs, and the dignity of principal chief was not too high for his thoughts. The position occupied by Black Horse seemed to him to be the easiest to step into, and to the attainment of that position his first efforts were directed. This object, with the capture of Marita Ortiz, engrossed his thoughts entirely.

Before attaining the position of Black Horse, it was necessary that this chief should be displaced from it. If Gabriel had been in his own country, his course would have been to gather a few followers, and to issue a pronunciamento, declaring Black Horse deposed, and appointing himself in his place. It was a somewhat singular plan of action that he intended to use among the Camanches, and he accordingly set at work to make friends for himself and enemies for Black Horse.

Such proceedings could not continue without coming to the notice of the person who was most interested in them. Black Horse, perceiving that Gabriel was his enemy, reciprocated the feeling by hating Gabriel with all his heart. It was natural that the Camanches, when the affair really came to an issue, should take sides with one of their own blood against a renegade white man, and the result was that Gabriel discovered that he had made an enemy of Black Horse without having gained any thing by it.

Being thus unable to gratify his ambitious desires, it was not unnatural that he should think of secession. He had a small number of followers—some discontented spirits and a few personal friends—whom he led into the same way of thinking.

This project finally took a definite shape. It was this band of followers that he led when he razed the village of Jarral Grande and carried off Marita Ortiz. It was his intention, when he left Mexico and kept on toward the north, to lead

them up into the country of the Moquis, far from the Camanche region, where he meant to establish a separate tribe, of which he was to be the head, and which was to live on plunder as the other Camanches lived.

This intention was frustrated by the meeting with Black Horse and his band; but it was not abandoned; it was only postponed. When the renegade perceived that he was not likely to obtain any further advancement among the Tennawas he resolved to carry out his plan and secede from them. This resolution was strengthened by information that he received, to the effect that a white girl, answering to the description of Marita Ortiz, was living among the Moquis, in a pueblo near the Little Colorado, and he lost no time in carrying out his intention.

He discovered, however, on counting noses, that there were only a few on whom he could rely with certainty, the influence of Black Horse having detached the greater part of his followers from him. He set out, therefore, with five select companions, determined to separate himself from the tribe, and to recover Marita if possible, leaving his further course to be controlled by circumstances.

His success was far better than he could have expected; for he not only found Marita, but found her in such a place, and in such an unprotected condition, that he had no difficulty in capturing her and carrying her off. Having secured her, he went on toward the north, intending to stop in the country of the Navahoes, with which tribe he thought of making an alliance.

His disappearance from the Camanche territory, and the purpose with which he had gone, were soon enough known among the Tennawas, and there was much excitement consequent thereupon. The excitement was mainly produced by Black Horse, who thought that here was another good opportunity, such as should not be allowed to pass, of punishing the man who had endeavored to degrade and supplant him.

He made a speech to the warriors in council assembled, in which he painted the character of the traitor in the darkest colors, and predicted fearful consequences from his attempt at secession, if it should be allowed to succeed. He urged that Gabriel should be followed, that the warriors who had gone

with him should be compelled to return to their tribe, and that he should suffer the punishment of death for his contumacy.

This speech found favor among the Tennawas, and the counsel of the chief was concurred in. If Gabriel had gone by himself, there might not have been much ado about his departure; but it was judged proper that his followers should be brought back, in order that such attempts might be discouraged for the future.

Black Horse, therefore, was permitted to take a dozen warriors, with whom he was to cross the mountains and apprehend the fugitives. He, as well as Gabriel, had heard the report concerning the white girl who was living in one of the pueblos of the Moquis, and he knew that he might look for the renegade in that direction.

He set off in high spirits, not doubting that he would discover and punish his enemy, and hoping that he might also gain possession of the white maiden, upon whom he had once set his eyes lovingly.

CHAPTER XII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

MARITA ORTIZ was almost in a state of frenzy when she found herself again in the power of her terrible lover. She had hoped that she was forever free from his persecutions, and had not thought it possible that he would ever be able to snatch her from the quiet retreat in which she had found a refuge, to take her from the friends who had so kindly protected her.

Far better would it have been, she thought, to have suffered herself to be joined to Ossoti, although she had not loved him; for then, not being a maiden, she would not have gone upon that ill-fated moonlight expedition, and would not have fallen into the hands of Gabriel.

But this was one of the hasty thoughts of her wild despair, and it was quickly repudiated; for there arose between her

and Ossotl, between her and every other man, the form of Tom Howell, the prisoner of the sacred cavern, the slave of the fire, who possessed, as she now felt, her true and only love.

When she saw the white man resting on the side of the mountain, just before she was surrounded by the Camanches, she thought that she recognized him among them. She was certain that she recognized the tall and stout form of the man whom she had seen when she dropped her mask in the pueblo.

How did they happen to be there? In what manner had Howell—if he it was—escaped from the cave in which he had been so hopelessly confined? Could he have been rescued by his friends, and was the large man one of them?

If so, she thought there might be some slight hope for herself. As she had recognized them, she might also have been recognized by them. They were Americans. As such they were brave and generous, and they would try to rescue her. When she had glanced at them in the excitement of her capture, she was sure that she had seen a commotion among them, as if they were interested in the scene below them, and were troubled about it. Might she not hope that they were thinking of her, and that they were anxious to assist her?

Such were her thoughts as she was hurried along by Gabriel, who rode rapidly at the head of his followers toward the north. She was mounted on a fleet horse, and he galloped by her side, ready to seize her bridle-rein if she should go wrong, or to quicken the speed of her horse if she should not go fast enough.

“Will you not speak to me then, *mi querida*?” asked Gabriel, in a soft and impassioned tone, that contrasted strangely with his wild Indian garb and the savage expression of his countenance. “Will you not even look at me, *mi alma*? You do not know, my dove, how much I love you. My heart was bound up in you, and I could not do without you.”

“If you do really love me,” entreated Marita, with her face still averted from him, “I beg that you will let me go back to those from whom you took me. You can not give me back to my mother, whom you murdered, but you can restore me to my friends in the wilderness, who loved me and

were kind to me. I ask nothing more, and you will grant it if you truly love me."

"I love you too well to lose you," replied the renegade. "It has cost me a great deal of trouble to get you, and now I mean to keep you. You shall never escape from me again. But you need not be afraid of me, my angel. There is no one among the Moquis who would treat you more tenderly than I. It will be the joy and care of my life to guard you, and to prove to you how much I love you."

Marito knew—she had known it when she made her fruitless appeal—that all entreaties would be thrown away on her savage lover, and she had not expected a more favorable answer.

"Where are you going?" she asked. "Do you mean to take me among those terrible Camanches?"

"No, my love. I have separated from that tribe, and these men who are with me are a few who left it to follow me. We are going up among the Navahoes, who are a more peaceable people."

Marita asked no more questions, but kept her face averted from the renegade, and answered him, when she was obliged to speak, in monosyllables.

Thus they rode until nightfall, when they stopped to rest. Marita ate a little of the food that was set before her, and then, wrapped in a blanket, laid down upon the ground. She was so exhausted by the journey, that her painful thoughts did not keep her awake long, and she soon sunk into a refreshing slumber.

She was aroused at an early hour in the morning, and found the little camp in a great state of excitement. A warrior had gone out, during the night, to bring in a horse that had strayed, and had made a most remarkable and unexpected discovery.

Within half a mile of their camp he had seen a smoke, to which he had naturally been attracted. Approaching it for the purpose of discovering what had caused it, he found that it arose from another camp of red-skins, which he proceeded to reconnoiter carefully.

To his great surprise he perceived it was a camp of Camanches, that they numbered thirteen with their chief, and

that the chief was no less a personage than Black Horse, the inveterate enemy of Gabriel Yanes.

He hastened back with the intelligence, which produced great consternation in Gabriel's party. The renegade received it without dismay, though he was evidently vexed and troubled; but his followers, as could easily be seen, were frightened, and did not know what to make of it.

Gabriel knew what it meant, well enough. He knew that it was the intention of Black Horse to follow him up, and to visit upon him a crowning vengeance, under the plea of punishing him for his treachery to the tribe. This would not have troubled him, and he would not have feared the worst that his enemy could do, if it had not been for Marita. He had no doubt that Black Horse had been guided in his search by the same information that he had himself received, concerning the whereabouts of the Mexican girl, and that he was directing his course toward the pueblos of the Moquis for the purpose of finding Marita as well as himself. He felt sure that he would be able to escape the pursuit of the chief, if his followers would stand by him. For the purpose of finding out whether they were to be depended upon, he called a council of war, and made a little speech to them.

He told them plainly that there could be no doubt that Black Horse had followed them for the purpose of executing vengeance upon them for their secession from the tribe. The wrath of that chief, he said, against him and them, as leader and participators in such a movement, was intense and not to be appeased. Death would be the only punishment that he would think of visiting upon all of them. Would they submit to this? Would they tamely give themselves up to the man who hated them, when life, and liberty, and independence were before them, to be achieved by a little effort and resolution? They were men, and he was sure that they would not abandon the purpose which had brought them so far. A short journey would bring them into the country of the Navahoes, where they would be received with open arms and would be in no danger of being molested by Black Horse or any of his tribe. The chief, Gabriel went on to say, was evidently heading for the pueblo from the vicinity of which they had come with their white prisoner, and was not looking

for them in that locality. All they had to do, therefore, was to keep out of his way, to make a circuit around his camp, and to let him take one direction while they should go in another. They were all in the same predicament, and must sink or swim together. If they would stay by him, and submit themselves to his guidance, he would engage to take them out of the reach of Black Horse and his Camanches, and to lead them safely into the country of the Navahoes.

This speech found favor with the warriors, who resolved that they would not be afraid of Black Horse, but would put themselves under the direction of Gabriel, and be guided by him in all things.

Marita was aroused, the camp was broken up, and they immediately mounted and set off quietly toward the north-west, for the purpose of avoiding the Camanches who had come in pursuit of them.

They did not ride rapidly, for their object was not so much to fly from Black Horse and his party, as to keep out of their way. They traveled with great caution, taking a course which, as they believed, would prevent their pursuers from getting on their trail. It may have been that the very precautions they used precipitated the catastrophe they feared.

When it was nearly noon, they thought that they had successfully evaded their pursuers, as they had made a long circuit and had seen no sign of any human being. They had stopped to prepare something to eat, as they had been obliged to neglect their morning meal. Some meat had been cooked, and they were resting and eating, when one of their number, who had been stationed on an adjoining hill as a scout, alarmed them by reporting that a number of Indians were approaching from the south, evidently following their trail.

A hasty inspection convinced them that their pursuers were Black Horse and his companions, as their number and appearance exactly tallied with the number and appearance of the party that had been observed the previous night.

It was evident that they must lose no time in continuing their journey, which had now really become a flight. With an exclamation of rage, the renegade hurried to assist Marita into her saddle. He then mounted, directing his companions to do the same, and they galloped off toward the north-west.

Marita had already heard, from Gabriel, that a party of Camanches was in pursuit of him and his followers. When she learned that they were actually on the trail, and so near as to be within sight, she was agitated by a variety of emotions, and hesitated as to what she should do. If they had been friends who were pursuing, she might have contrived many devices for retarding the flight of her capturers. She concluded, however, that no better fate would await her, in all probability, if Gabriel should be overtaken and slain, and that she had better do as she was ordered to do, trusting only in Providence for relief from her troubles and perils.

When the pursuers reached the hill from which they had been descried, they perceived the deserted camp, and saw Gabriel and his followers hastening away in the distance. They were evidently excited, for they stopped only a few moments, and then put their horses to the top of their speed in pursuit.

Gabriel's followers saw them coming, and their spirits, which had been downcast since they first learned that they were pursued, fell perceptibly. They looked anxiously at each other and at their leader, who could see too plainly that they repented of what they had done, and that they wished themselves well out of the scrape into which he had led them.

To cheer them up, he told them that there was no danger; that they were easily increasing the distance between themselves and their pursuers, whose horses were doubtless in poorer condition than their own; and that he would soon bring them to a place, the location of which he well knew, where they might bid defiance to Black Horse, if he had the whole tribe of the Tennawas at his back.

The drooping spirits of his comrades were somewhat raised by these words, especially when they perceived that they were gaining on their pursuers, and they rode bravely on until they came to a country that seemed to be composed of ruins, many of which bore evidence of a superior style of architecture.

Gabriel passed through these ruins without stopping, although some of them appeared to be available places of refuge, and rode on until he reached a large stone building,

which was in a good state of repair. It was situated at the edge of a forest, and was nearly surrounded by rugged heights and mountain ranges.

The renegade and his companions dismounted, and led their horses into a sort of court-yard, and immediately commenced to make preparations for defending the position.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CASA GRANDE.

The *Casas Grandes* (great houses) that are still to be found in the country lying between the Rio Grande and the Colorado—to speak more definitely, in the country of the Navahoes—were erected at a period far beyond the memory of any living man, and the Indians who inhabit that region have not even a tradition concerning them. They can only say that they are *casas grandes*, and that comprises the sum total of their information on the subject.

In the absence of any history of these ruins, it has been supposed, as the easiest supposition, that they were erected by the ancient Aztecs, whose civilization, doubtless greatly exaggerated, is made to account for a great many singular things.

Whoever may have built them, it is certain that their architecture and masonry are of a style far superior to that of the pueblos in the country of the Moquis, although there are points of resemblance between them, and the inhabitants of the pueblos may be descendants of the builders of the *casas grandes*. If they are, it is strange that they have not the faintest tradition concerning their ancestors.

One of the most remarkable circumstances connected with these ruins, considering their antiquity, is the manner in which they have withstood the ravages of time. That in which Gabriel and his comrades took refuge with Marita was in an excellent state of preservation. The court-yard, it is true, was choked up with rubbish, and overgrown by wild vegetation, but the stone-work was generally in good order, and the

wool-work seemed to be as sound as it was when it was put into the building.

The house was only one story in height, but that story was an unusually tall one. Besides the court-yard, it was divided into ten or a dozen rooms, of very small size, with diminutive doors, and with little openings, that could hardly be called windows, for the admission of air and light. The roof was covered with a mass of rubbish, which afforded soil for a miscellaneous growth of weeds and bushes; but it was still strong and in good condition. Beneath the ground-floor was an estufa, or underground council-chamber, although it was nearly filled up by the accumulations of an unknown number of centuries.

Gabriel was quite elated after he had brought his followers and his prisoner within this building. He had not overstated the fact when he said that they would be able to bid defiance to Black Horse, even if he should have the whole tribe of Tennawas at his back; for the building was not only defensible, but was really impregnable to such weapons as the Camanches could bring to bear upon it.

As has been stated, the renegade and his companions at once began to make preparations for defense. He set the Indians at work to block up the narrow doorway with the rubbish that lay in the court-yard, while he examined the roof and the walls for the purpose of seeing whether there was any opening by which a foe could enter.

Finding them all sound and safe, he assisted his followers to make the doorway secure, and then led them up on the roof, where they threw up a fortification of loose stones, as the roof afforded the best position for observing the movements of their enemies, as well as a good elevation to fire from.

These preparations were not completed, and Gabriel was still upon the roof, when Black Horse and his band were seen coming from the south. They were riding slowly, following the trail of the fugitives, and their horses were evidently fatigued. When they came in sight of the stone building they stopped, for the trail led to it, and they rightly supposed that those whom they were pursuing had taken refuge there.

Gabrie made his men conceal themselves, in the vain hope that his enemies might go by, though he could not have supposed that such practiced scalp-hunters as the Camanches would be deceived by any such artifice.

They were not deceived, for they knew as well what had become of their prey as if they had seen them enter the building.

Black Horse halted his party at a short distance from the house, and sent one of them forward to parley with the runaways.

Gabrie suffered the warrior to approach until he thought that he was near enough to the house, and then showed himself and asked him what he wanted.

"I come from the great chief, Black Horse," replied the Indian. "He wishes to know why the White Wolf runs away from his friends, and why he hides himself in a stone house. Black Horse wishes to enter, that he may smoke the pipe with his friend and his red brothers."

Gabriel at first directed the messenger and his chief to go to a place very different from the happy hunting-ground in which the Indian expects to roam after his death, and then replied to him in a more orderly manner.

"Tell your chief," he said, "that I know what he wants, and that he shall not get it. He wants my life, but he will lose his own before he takes mine. His tongue is crooked when he calls us friends and brothers, for he knows that he is our enemy, and that he wants our scalps to dry in his lodge. We have nothing to do with him and his tribe, for we have left them, and we do not mean to go back to them. He has no business to follow us. Let him go his way, and we will go our way. He had better pass on and leave us to ourselves, for he can not touch us, and he may leave his scalp here if he stays."

The messenger then addressed himself to the Indians who were on the roof of the building, telling them that if they would give up Gabriel and the white girl, and would return to their tribe, they should be forgiven for their secession, and received back as brothers.

The renegade flew into a passion, and ordered the warrior to return to his friends immediately, or a bullet would be sent

through his head. As this order was enforced with a leveled rifle, the messenger quietly withdrew.

Having thus declared his determination not to surrender, Gabriel disposed his men in the most advantageous positions upon the roof and in the building, so as to be prepared to resist an assault, which he expected would be made immediately.

It was not the intention of the Camanche chief, however, to risk an assault. He knew the strength of the fortress in which the fugitives were concealed, and he was not disposed to throw away his men in a vain attempt to capture an impregnable stronghold. His force consisted of thirteen men, including himself, and these men were sufficient, he thought, to surround the building and starve the besieged into a surrender.

He warily made his arrangements with the view of effecting this result, placing his men in such positions that the house was commanded by them on all sides, and the defenders could not show their heads without exposing themselves to the rifles of their assailants.

When these preparations were completed, the assailants were pushed up as close to the walls of the building as they could go without endangering themselves, an occasional fire was maintained between them and the garrison, until night put an end to it. On the side of the besieged, one man was severely wounded; but no one was hurt among their assailants. The fact was, that Gabriel had difficulty in inducing his followers to turn their weapons against members of their own tribe, and their guns were fired at random when they were fired at all. He could not help feeling a suspicion that they were afraid of being compelled to surrender in the end, and that they wished to have none of their kindred blood to account for.

Shortly after they reached the building, Gabriel had sent Marita into one of the little rooms, and had ordered her to remain there. As there was no way of fastening her in, she was really at liberty to go where she pleased within the house. As she was unable to escape, and was unwilling to come in contact with Gabriel, she had no desire to leave the apartment.

It was a very small room, not more than eight by ten feet in measurement, and the high walls made it seem even smaller. The doorway was very narrow, and so low that she was obliged to stoop in order to enter. The window was a diminutive aperture in the thick stones of the wall, too high for her to reach, and too small for her head to pass through, if she could have reached it.

There was considerable rubbish in the room, and the air was damp and unwholesome; but it was comparatively pleasant to Marita, while it was untainted by the presence of Gabriel.

There she remained alone until nightfall, filled with painful thoughts and fearful forebodings. She heard the parley between Gabriel and the messenger of Black Horse, and knew that the quarrel must be fought out. She listened to the drizzling rifle-shots, and wished that the besieged and the besiegers might slay each other, and leave her alone in the wilderness.

After dark Gabriel came, and made a fire for her in a corner of her room, and brought her some food. He told her that he was obliged to stay on guard during the night, but she need not be alarmed, as the Camanches would soon be driven off, and they would resume their journey.

Marita answered him nothing, and was glad when he relieved her of his presence. She soon wrapped herself in her blanket, and tried to sleep, that she might escape from the overpowering loneliness of the place and the fearful thoughts that afflicted her.

She had fallen into a slight doze, when she was awakened by a noise at her little window.

She looked up, and perceived, by the flickering light of her fire, a small face set in the aperture—a black face, with bright eyes, grinning mouth, and shining white teeth.

She was so startled by this apparition, that she uttered a scream that brought Gabriel into the room. When he asked her what was the matter, she was sufficiently composed to declare that it was nothing, that she had only been frightened by a dream from which she had suddenly awaked.

The black face had disappeared from the window when Gabriel entered the room; but it again darkened the aperture as soon as he left. Marita had recovered her presence of

mind, and was anxious to know what it meant. She was about to speak to it, when a voice issued from the grinning mouth.

"Don't be scared."

"Who and what are you?" asked the girl.

"Only me—Skip."

"Where did you come from? What do you want here?"

"Come to look after you. Master Dave sent me."

"Who is master Dave?"

"Don't you know? You saw him once—in that town."

"The white man whom I saw in the pueblo?"

"Yes. Mighty good man. He sent me."

"Where is he?"

"Coming soon—he and all of 'em."

"Is Señor Howell one of them?" asked Marita, anxious to learn whether she had been right in supposing that she recognized her American lover among the group that was resting on the mountain side when she was captured.

"Yes—he and the man with the big watch."

Marita's heart leaped for joy. She now knew that her lover had escaped from the bondage of the sacred fire, and that he had been joined by his true friend, Sam Grinter, and by the tall American trader whom she had seen at the pueblo. They were coming to help her. They were Americans, and could do every thing. They would surely rescue her, and her troubles would be at an end.

"Are they coming to help me?" she asked Skip.

"Yes—coming soon—sent me first."

"How did you get up to that window?"

"Big tree here. Skip climbed up and hid in it. Injins all about, but they can't find Skip. Big branch reaches out to this hole, and Skip ran out on the branch. Do you want any thing?"

"Nothing—except to get out of this place."

"Skip might squeeze in there, but couldn't squeeze you out."

"I must wait for my friends, I suppose. Did you see the man who came in here when I screamed? I am afraid of him."

"Shan't hurt you. Skip will stay in the tree. Make a

noise if he scares you, and Skip will shoot him. Good-night."

The black face was withdrawn from the window, and Marita fell upon her knees, in thankfulness for the help that had come to her, and for that which she believed to be near at hand. When her prayer was finished, she wrapped herself in her blanket, and slept peacefully and well.

CHAPTER XIV.

OSSOTTI'S ALLIANCE.

WHEN Tom Howell saw Marita carried off before his eyes, his excitement and indignation were so great that he blamed Longman severely for not permitting him to start at once to her rescue. He knew that they were Cumanches who had taken her, and he feared, although he could give no good reason for his fear, that she had again fallen into the hands of Gabriel Yanes.

When Skip started off, in obedience to the orders of his master, Howell commenced to run after him; but he soon discovered that his strength was not equal to the effort, and he fell breathless to the ground before he had gone many steps.

"I told you so," said Longman, as he picked up his friend. "You must have some food and a little rest before you can follow her. You have been so long shut up that you have no strength."

"But she will be lost. That infernal Gabriel will carry her off, and I shall never see her again."

"Don't be alarmed. Skip has gone, and he will never lose sight of her. We will follow as soon as we can. Let us go down to my cache, where my horses are, and make ready to start."

Howell was glad enough to comply with this suggestion, and Longman led the way to the ravine in which his horses were concealed, where he told Howell that he must posse

his soul in patience for a while, at least until a good breakfast could be cooked and eaten. Skip, he said, had already taken a horse, and had gone galloping off after the Camanches, in compliance with his orders. He knew that the black boy would not lose the trail, and would stop for nothing until he had learned whether Marita had been taken. When Skip was satisfied on this point, he would return to bring them information of what he had learned, or would stay near Marita if he considered it best to do so. In short, Longman was entirely satisfied that the boy would do exactly what ought to be done, and as much as he or either of his friends could do.

"You spoke as if you knew who it was that carried off the girl, or as if you had some suspicion on that point," said the trader, when they were seated on the ground at their meal. "I would like to know whom you refer to, and what reason you have for your suspicions."

Howell told how he became acquainted with Marita, and related what he knew of Gabriel Yanes in connection with her, Sam Grinter confirming that part of the story of which he had knowledge.

"That is the fellow who has got her, I have no doubt," said Longman, when his friend had finished his narrative. "I can't imagine how he lost her, or how she happened to be in this country. It is strange, too, that he should find her here, so far from the country of the Camanches, and that he should take her toward the north, instead of going in the direction that would lead him back to his own people. It is enough to know that he has got her, and that we must follow him to recover her."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Howell.

"As it 'pears to hev come my turn to say suthin'," remarked Sam Grinter, "I will put in right here. It's my advice that we should see my old pardner, Jack Bird, and tell him all that has turned up, and ax him to help us in this scrape. I allow that Jack knows this yere kentry, and he's as good as gold, every pound of him—and that's many a pound."

"We will ride by his camp when we start," said Longman.

"I war goin' on to say that Jack is a good-hearted chap,

and that he will do what he ken to help a friend, or any decent white man in trouble. I ort to hev told him that those sculpin' Camanches war piroutin' about yere; but they're off now, and I reckon he's heerd of 'em by this time. Old tickler," continued the Kentuckian, luggin' out his watch, "keeps a-sayin' Jack Bird—Jack Bird—all the time, and I shouldn't wonder if he war prowlin' about somewhar."

The warning of the wonderful watch was quickly confirmed; for the bushes soon parted, and the ruddy face and retund figure of the stout trapper were seen approaching the group. He was made acquainted with Longman and Howell, who cordially welcomed him, and invited him to share their breakfast.

"By the horn spoons!" exclaimed Jack. "It knocks me stupid to see so many white folks in these parts. I was lookin' for you, Sam Grinter, and 'lowed that you had sartinly been rubbed out by a lot of Camanches that have been ridin' about here. What in thunder are Camanches doin' in these diggin's?"

Longman and Howell undertook to explain the matter to him, and he listened to their narrative with interest and great astonishment.

"By the horn spoons!" he exclaimed. "That beats b'ar stories! I suppose you are all goin' on the trail, and this hoss wants to be one of the crowd. It's a long time since I've seen any fun. The sooner you start the better, and we will go by my camp, if you are willin', as I want to make a cache for my traps."

Longman immediately prepared to start, glad of such an acquisition. He selected good horses for Howell and himself, and left the remainder of his animals in a secure place, where there was water and good grazing. He had already deposited his packs in a cache.

They then went to Jack Bird's camp, where the trapper concealed his valuables, and brought out Grinter's horse and his own.

Thus mounted, and all well provided with arms and ammunition, they set out, and had no difficulty in finding the trail of the Camanches. Before they had gone far, they discovered the track of a shod horse, which Longman pronounced to be the one which Skip had taken.

They rode until the darkness would not permit them to follow the trail any longer, and then encamped for the night, a proceeding which was rendered necessary by Howell's condition, as the ride had so fatigued him that he was unable to keep the saddle any longer. In the morning they were early on the way, and Howell, after his rest and a hearty breakfast, declared himself able to travel the whole day.

It was a little before noon when they reached the place where Gabriel and his party had encamped the previous night, and here they perceived that Marita had been among them, and that Skip was still on the trail. There were indications, also, to show that the Camanches had abandoned the camp at an early hour and in a hurry.

"Something has frightened them away," said Jack Bird, when he noticed these indications, and observed that the savages had diverged from the course which they had been pursuing.

It was not long before they found out the cause of the flight; for the trail that they were following was joined by another and larger trail, which was made, as they concluded, by a party in pursuit of Gabriel and his men. Bird carefully examined the tracks, and gave it as his opinion that Skip had been between the two parties, close upon the heels of the foremost one.

They did not know what to make of the last trail. They were quite sure that it had not been made by Indians from the pueblo, and they finally decided, after many surmises, that they knew nothing about it.

Night found them surrounded by old ruins, among which they were obliged to encamp, although Howell declared that he was not at all weary—a declaration that was not confirmed by his appearance.

While they were preparing their camp, Grinter descried a horseman coming toward them from the south, and gave the alarm to his companions. As he was alone, and was rapidly following the trail that had brought them there, they resolved to find out who and what he was. Accordingly, they placed their horses in concealment, and laid down behind a ruined wall, awaiting the approach of the stranger.

"I think I know that horse," said Howell, when the rider

was near enough to be distinctly seen. "It is a sorrel that Marita had in Mexico, or one exactly like it."

"It is a remarkable horse, and I don't wonder that you remember it," replied Longman, as the stranger came nearer. "I am sure that I know that red-skin, for I have seen him in the pueblo where the girl was living."

It was, indeed, Ossoti, who had set out alone, like a true knight-errant, to the rescue of the white maiden whom he loved, and he had taken her horse, which was the only one in the pueblo.

As he came near to the ruins, he seemed to have a suspicion that they were tenanted; for he stopped his horse and examined them carefully. The white men then rose from their concealment, and made signs of friendship to him. After some hesitation he approached, dismounted, and gave them his hand. It was evident from his dress that he was one of the pueblo Indians, and Jack Bird, who had a little knowledge of their language, was deputed to act as interpreter, for the purpose of finding out who he was and where he was going.

"My name is Ossoti," he said, in reply to the questions of the trapper. "I have come from the pueblo of my people, a long day's journey from here, and am going in search of a white maiden whom we found in the mountains, and who has been living with us. She was taken by some strange Indians, and carried off toward the north. My heart was sad, and I resolved that I would bring her back or perish before her eyes. This is her horse that I am riding. She is as beautiful as the moon, and I love her with all my strength."

"Another lover," said Longman, clapping Howell on the shoulder. "He is a dangerous rival, Tom, and you will have to put on your best looks."

When Jack Bird explained to Ossoti that they were on the same errand as himself, his countenance fell a little; but it brightened up again, and he asked to be permitted to accompany them.

"Tell him that I am afraid he won't be of much use," said Longman; "but he is welcome to go with us, if he will keep quiet and obey orders."

In the morning the party again set out, and soon came in sight of the old stone house in which Gabriel had taken refuge. Jack Bird immediately perceived some suspicious indications about the building, which caused him to halt, and direct his friends to dismount and remain concealed for a while. The wisdom of this course was shortly manifest; for they heard two shots, one proceeding from the roof of the house, and the other from the forest near it.

"There they are," said the trapper. "The girl and the Camanches are shut up in that old house, and the party that followed them are lying about it. We must be careful how we move, or we will have a three-cornered fight before we are ready for it."

Under his direction the horses were concealed, and he went forward to reconnoiter the position, leaving his friends behind him. He returned within an hour, reporting that the Indians who were lying about the building were also Camanches, and that they were so stationed as to cut off approach to the house, and to keep it in a state of siege. They numbered about a dozen, he thought; but he could not understand why they were there, or even guess at the cause of their hostility to those within the building.

"We shall soon know," said Longman, "for here comes Skip."

At that moment the black boy appeared among them, as if he had risen out of the ground, grinning his joy at seeing his master again.

"Is she there?" asked the trader.

"Yes—white girl there."

"Is she safe?"

"All right."

"Can we get her out of there?"

"Not yet—have to wait."

"What shall we do, then?"

"Nothing yet. Hide somewhere, and wait."

"What Indians are those about the building, and what are they trying to do?"

"Camanches—Black Horse and his braves. Black Horse big chief—wants white man and white woman."

"How do you find out what is going on there?"

"Climbed a big tree, where I can see the white girl and speak to her. Stay in the tree and watch her."

"Very well. You had better go back and look after her now. If any thing happens, or if we can do any thing, you must let us know."

"Yes."

Tom Howell was anxious to go with Skip, that he, to-might see the object of his love, and watch over her; but he was restrained by his friends.

"You would do more hurt than good," said Longman. "You can't go where that boy can, and none of us could, without being caught. We will trust to Skip, and he will let us know when we can be of use. He is worth more than all of us just now."

The young American reluctantly consented to remain, and Skip disappeared as he had come.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR.

THERE was one enemy against which Gabriel did not calculate when he resolved to stand a siege in the *casa grande*. That enemy was not Black Horse and his band; for he felt certain that, if his Indians would prove faithful to him, he would be able to beat off or weary out his Camanche assailants. Nor was it the party of white men, headed by Jack Bird: for the renegade was not expecting them, and he would have been glad to hear of their arrival, hoping that his red and white antagonists would neutralize each other.

The enemy against which he had not prepared was an invisible enemy, less palpable, but more formidable than any of the mortal foes that were arrayed against him. It was, in short, starvation.

Hunger and thirst soon began to stare him in the face, and he could not shut out the prospect, although he avoided it as long as he could. The morning after the siege commenced he

gave Marita the last scrap of meat and the last morsel of parched corn that he possessed, and his followers were equally destitute. They had not hunted while they were lying in wait in the vicinity of the pueblo, expecting to kill plenty of game at their leisure during their northward journey; but they had been compelled to travel so rapidly, that they were still unprovided when they entered the *casa grande*.

Marita ate her breakfast with a relish, for she had received good news, had had a good night's rest, and was in excellent spirits. She was not afraid of Gabriel, for she had a strange reliance on the black boy who had appeared to her at the window, and she felt herself safe under his protection.

The renegade left her with a sigh, and was compelled to listen to the complaints of his comrades, who were alarmed at the prospect of having nothing to eat.

At this inopportune moment, another messenger from Black Horse appeared, who craved a parley. He was proceeding to offer liberal terms to the Camanches in the building, if they would abandon the white man and return to their friends, when his talk was cut short by Gabriel, who threatened to shoot him if he uttered another word.

The beleaguered commander then endeavored to cheer up his followers, telling them that they had often subsisted on horse-flesh; that they need not fear starvation while they had plenty of horses to kill and eat; and that their enemies would soon grow tired and abandon the fruitless siege.

This was true enough, as far as it went. The horses would serve as food, and it might become necessary to kill them, as there was nothing for them to eat in the building; but something else was wanting, besides food. There had been a small supply of water, that had collected in a cavity in the court-yard; but the horses had got at it, and had drank it all up, so that there was not a drop of the precious fluid left.

As for Marita, she fared very well, both mentally and bodily. Gabriel was nearly all the time busy on the roof, endeavoring to pick off Black Horse and his warriors with his rifle—a duty in which he received but little assistance from his own Camanches—and she was thus spared the infliction of his presence. She got no dinner, but she received some intelligence that was better than any dinner.

About noon the black boy again made his appearance at her window, with his white teeth glistening, and his whole face melted into a broad grin. Marita joyfully greeted him, and looked at him as if she expected some news.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"You will be, and then Skip will bring you something to eat."

"I am very thirsty."

"Here is some water," said Skip, putting a canteen through the opening. "Hide it, and be careful of it."

Marita concealed the canteen, and looked at the boy as if she expected to hear something more.

"Has any one come?" she asked. "Have you seen my friends yet?"

"Yes; master Dave has come, with three more white men, and one Injun."

"One Indian?"

"Yes; handsome Injun, on fine sorrel hoss."

Marita at once thought of Ossoti and her Panchito; but it was not worth while to speak her thought to the boy.

"Are they near here? Can they get me out of this place? Will they try?"

"Yes; they are all right," replied Skip, who had learned that expression from Longman, and attached a great deal of meaning to it.

"When will they do any thing?"

"Not now—have to wait. Don't be scared. Skip will bring you something to eat when you get hungry."

With these words the black boy vanished, leaving Marita in a very cheerful and hopeful state of mind.

Affairs in the fortress, meanwhile, did not look promising for the success of Gabriel. He kept trying to pick off his outlying enemies, but his efforts were not very effective, and his followers kept grumbling so sorely that the day was any thing but a pleasant one to him.

One of the horses had been killed, and the warriors had cooked and eaten a portion of its flesh; but they became clamorous for water, and their symptoms of discontent were such as to amount almost to open mutiny. Accustomed

as they were to privations, and able to go a long time without food or drink, Gabriel could not help feeling that their murmurs were caused, in a great degree, by something more than the want of water—that they were discouraged, and inclined to desert their leader, whom they had followed thus far contentedly.

As the evening wore away, the complaints settled down to a demand that one of their number should be allowed to leave the building and go and search for water.

This was a request that the renegade was very loth to grant; but it was so stubbornly insisted upon, that he was obliged to consent, and he selected Is-sa-keep, a strong and active warrior, for the errand. The entrance to the courtyard was partially opened, and the Indian was sent forth, with instructions to procure the water at an arroyo which they had crossed on their way to the *casa grande*.

Darkness succeeded to dusk, and hour after hour of the night wore away; but Is-sa-keep did not return. Gabriel waited impatiently and in a very bad humor, while his remaining Camanches cast expressive glances at each other until he was forced to the conclusion that the warrior had either been captured, or had deserted to the enemy. He then laid down to take some rest, being completely exhausted by watching.

Early in the morning his suspicions were confirmed; for there came another messenger from Black Horse, who turned out to be the missing Is-sa-keep. Gabriel was alone on the roof when he appeared, and ordered him, suppressing his wrath, to halt and deliver his message. The renegade had his rifle ready at his side, for he was determined that the traitor should pay the penalty of his treachery.

The message was similar to that which Black Horse had sent the previous day, and was addressed to the Indians, whom Is-sa-keep could plainly see, although they were not visible to their leader. The messenger told them that they would be received with open arms, if they would return to their friends, assuring them that they would soon be compelled to surrender if they remained in the building, and reminding them of the privations that they had already endured.

"Why will you hunger and thirst," asked Is-sa-keep, "when

your friends are willing to feed you? Why will you be led to ruin and starvation by a white stranger, when your own brothers are ready to receive you and supply your wants?"

These words sealed the fate of the daring messenger; for a bullet from Gabriel's rifle, which had been carefully aimed at him during his discourse, sped through his brain, and he fell to the ground a corpse.

A shower of bullets whistled over the roof, but the renegade was untouched. He uttered a yell of defiance, and went below, to cheer his remaining comrades, and prepare them for another struggle.

His remaining comrades! He descended to the ground-floor, and saw that there were none remaining. They were not in the court-yard, nor in any of the rooms of the building. The horses were there; but their riders had gone out as he soon discovered, through the opening that had been left at the entrance. Discouraged by the prospect before them enticed by the repeated promises of Black Horse, and indignant at the killing of their friend, they had deserted him, and he was alone!

He could not suppress a cry of agony, as he found himself face to face with despair and death. He madly filled up the opening in the doorway with stones and rubbish, and then rushed to the room in which he had left Marita.

He found her sitting on her blanket, her face lighted by a hopeful smile; but she started up in affright as he entered, and as she saw the expression of rage and despair that was so plainly written on his features.

As he hurried into the room, he turned over with his foot the blanket on which Marita had been sitting, disclosing a canteen of water and some cooked meats, which Skip had brought to her the night before.

"What does this mean?" he angrily exclaimed. "Where did these things come from?"

"The saints have fed me," replied Marita, after some hesitation.

"The saints be ____! This is very mysterious. There has been more than one traitor about me. But it is not worth while to trouble myself about it now. It is too late to think of such things, for all is over."

"What do you mean?" earnestly asked Marita, wondering at his strange expressions and his altered manner.

"Marita, *mi alma*, all is lost to me. Nothing remains but you and death. My followers have left me—those whom I brought from the country of the Camanches, and who, as I believed, would be faithful to the last. They have deserted me—the pack of cowardly dogs!—and have gone over to my most inveterate enemy, who has surrounded this house with a number of savages."

Marita hardly knew whether to be dismayed or rejoiced at these tidings; but she was afraid of the wild glare of Gabriel's eyes, and she silently shrunk back into a corner.

"They know that I am alone," continued the renegade, "and they will soon overpower and destroy me. But their triumph will not be as great as they expect it to be. We will die together, Marita."

He drew his knife, and seized the frightened girl around the waist. She screamed, and looked toward the window, as if expecting succor from that quarter; but no little black face met her glance with a friendly grin, and she commended herself to the saints.

At this moment there was a rattling noise among the stones on the roof, and voices were heard within the house. The face of the renegade darkened, and he looked fiercely at Marita.

"They are coming!" he hissed in her ear. "They are coming to kill me, and they shall see how I can die. We will die together; but you must die first, *mi alma*, for I have sworn that you shall not fall into their hands alive!"

Marita screamed as he raised his knife, and an Indian darted through the narrow doorway, followed by a white man. It was Ossoti, followed by Tom Howell.

Perceiving the danger of Marita, the young Indian at once rushed upon the renegade; but was met by a knife-stroke, that laid him on the floor, bathed in his own blood.

At the same instant a black face appeared at the little window, a pistol-shot rung through the room, and Gabriel fell in his death-agony.

Marita fainted, for she was overcome by the horror and the suddenness of these events, and awoke to find herself in the

arms of Tom Howell, with Longman and Sam Grinter bending over her tenderly, and the black boy grinning at the group.

"There is something else to attend to now, boys," said Jack Bird, whose burly form blocked the doorway. "The red-skins are comin' up on all sides, and we have hot work on hand."

CHAPTER XVI.

"STOPPED AT LAST!"

IT was Skip who brought Howell and his friends to the rescue of Marita.

He had listened to the message of Is-sa-keep, and had witnessed the fate of that warrior. He had also witnessed the desertion of the remainder of Gabriel's followers, and had seen a number of the outlying Camanches leave their stations and gather together at one place.

Having observed these circumstances, he had quickly formed his opinion of them, and had come to the conclusion that the time had come for the white men to act.

Climbing down from his station in the tree, he hastened to the place where his friends were concealed, and briefly explained to them the position of affairs. He exhorted them to lose no time in taking possession of the building, or the Camanches would be ahead of them, as they were evidently preparing to take it by storm.

They needed no urging, but seized their weapons, and at once followed Skip, who guided them to the tree in which he had been stationed. They climbed the tree, from which they could easily step upon the roof of the building, and hastened to search for Marita and Gabriel. Skip ran out upon the branch by the window, having heard some sounds that led him to believe that he might be useful in that position.

They had met with no difficulty in making their way to the building, as the Camanche scouts on that side had been

whhdrawl from their stations, and they found no enemy to oppose them while they searched for Marita.

Ossoti was the fortunate man who discovered her; but his devoted bravery was rewarded only by his death; for the stab that Gabriel dealt him was a mortal wound, and he had breathed his last when Jack Bird gave the alarm that the Indians were coming.

Marita had recovered from her swoon, and begged to be allowed to accompany her friends upon the roof. She was permitted to do so, on condition that she would remain concealed behind Gabriel's barricade.

When the men reached the roof, they perceived that Bird had not exaggerated the danger when he said that they had hot work before them; for the Camanches could be seen approaching in a formidable body, having been strengthened by the desertions from Gabriel's fortress.

Black Horse supposed, as he had good reason to believe, that he now had an easy task, as it was only necessary to storm the stronghold and overpower one man, which ought to be easily accomplished with nearly a score of warriors. His men advanced with a bold front, therefore, some of them bearing poles with prongs, by the aid of which they expected to mount to the roof.

The white men, concealed from the sight of their adversaries, were equally confident, for they were five in number, counting Skip, and all well armed. Besides their own rifles and pistols, they had the weapons of Gabriel and Ossoti.

They waited until the Camanches came within easy range, when Jack Bird gave the signal, and three rifles flashed out their defiance.

Nothing could have astonished the Camanches more than this reception; for the trapper had kept his friends so carefully concealed, up to this time, that they had not the least suspicion that any white men were in the vicinity. Their astonishment was so great, at receiving the fire of three such deadly rifles, that they suddenly halted, as if by common consent.

It was only a momentary halt. Black Horse, raging, urged them on, and they rushed again at the building, when they were met by a volley from the four remaining rifles.

This did not stop them, and they ran on, planted their poles against the walls, and climbed toward the roof, determined to penetrate the mystery.

Three more rifles had been loaded, and were discharged against the stormers. Then the white men resorted to their pistols, which they used with such effect, that not more than one or two of the daring Camanches reached the roof, to meet their death there.

Black Horse and the remnant of his band ran off howling, having lost nearly half their number. They were satisfied, for they had found out "what the matter was."

The white men, also, had sustained a very serious loss; for Sam Grinter lay upon the flat roof of the building, mortally wounded. A shot from a Camanche who reached the roof had passed through his watch-pocket, demolishing his wonderful timepiece, and inflicting a wound through which his life-blood was welling rapidly.

His friends gathered around him, and Jack Bird held the head of the wounded man upon his knee, while Longman vainly endeavored to stanch the blood.

"He is dying, poor fellow!" said Bird, as his tears fell on the face of his old comrade.

"I reckon that's so," faintly replied the Kentuckian, opening his eyes. "I make no doubt that I'm done fur, this time. I wonder what old tickler thinks about it. Thar ain't sech another watch goin'—not in *this* world. Take her out, Jack, and let me hear what she says."

The trapper drew the watch from the bloody pocket, and held it up, shattered and silent, before the face of the dying man.

"Stopped at last!" muttered Grinter, as he closed his eyes and ceased to breathe.

All were sad after the death of the Kentuckian, and Jack Bird bewailed the loss of his friend very pathetically, eulogizing his many good qualities, and finding not a word to say to his discredit.

"What is to be done now?" inquired Howell, after a while. "What has become of the Camanches?"

"They have only hauled off to repair damages, as seamen may," replied Bird. "Don't you see them there in the edge

of the timber? They have found out what we are made of, and I reckon they don't want another brush with us."

The trapper was correct in his surmise. The band of Black Horse had suffered so severely, that they were in no condition to risk another similar encounter. Many of them wished to go away; but the chief was unwilling to leave while he supposed his hated enemy to be alive. After some debate, it was determined to besiege the *casa grande* as before.

The day was thus spent, and the night was occupied in recovering and burying the bodies of their fallen comrades. The white men, also, buried their dead, digging graves in the *estufa* under the old building.

The next morning the besieged held a council of war, and Howell urged that some decisive step should be taken, saying that the Camanches evidently desired to starve them into a surrender, and that they were strong enough, in his opinion, to go out and scatter their red assailants.

"Perhaps we might be strong enough," replied Bird, "if poor Sam Grinter was living; but he was a great loss. I think it is useless to risk our lives, for we are in no special hurry to get away from here."

"Jack Bird is right," said Longman. "The red-skins will probably leave of their own accord before long. What is the matter with them now?"

There was quite a commotion among the Camanches, who hurried from their various stations to one point, and soon mounted their horses and rode rapidly away.

The white men were unable to account for this occurrence, until they noticed a long train of wagons coming across the plain in the distance.

As the caravan approached, they fired their guns and rode out to meet it. It proved to be a United States exploring expedition, returning to Arkansas by way of Texas.

Our friends were offered the benefit of this escort as far as they wished to go, an offer which they gratefully accepted, and they made a safe and pleasant journey to Texas, without meeting with any further eventful incidents.

Jack Bird was left, on the way, at his trapping range, after having been induced by Longman to accept a number of presents from the trader's packs.

Tom Howell found plenty of time for love-making during the journey; but his suit with Marita was already won, and he was wedded to her shortly after his arrival in Texas.

In that new country he purchased a large tract of land, in connection with Longman, and they applied themselves to the business of stock-raising, which proved to be successful and profitable. They continued in partnership, and their domestic establishment was presided over and beautified by Marita.

Among the most important and valued of their assistants was a sprightly young black man who answered to the name of Skip, although he had gained a Christian cognomen, and who was a great favorite with his mistress.

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